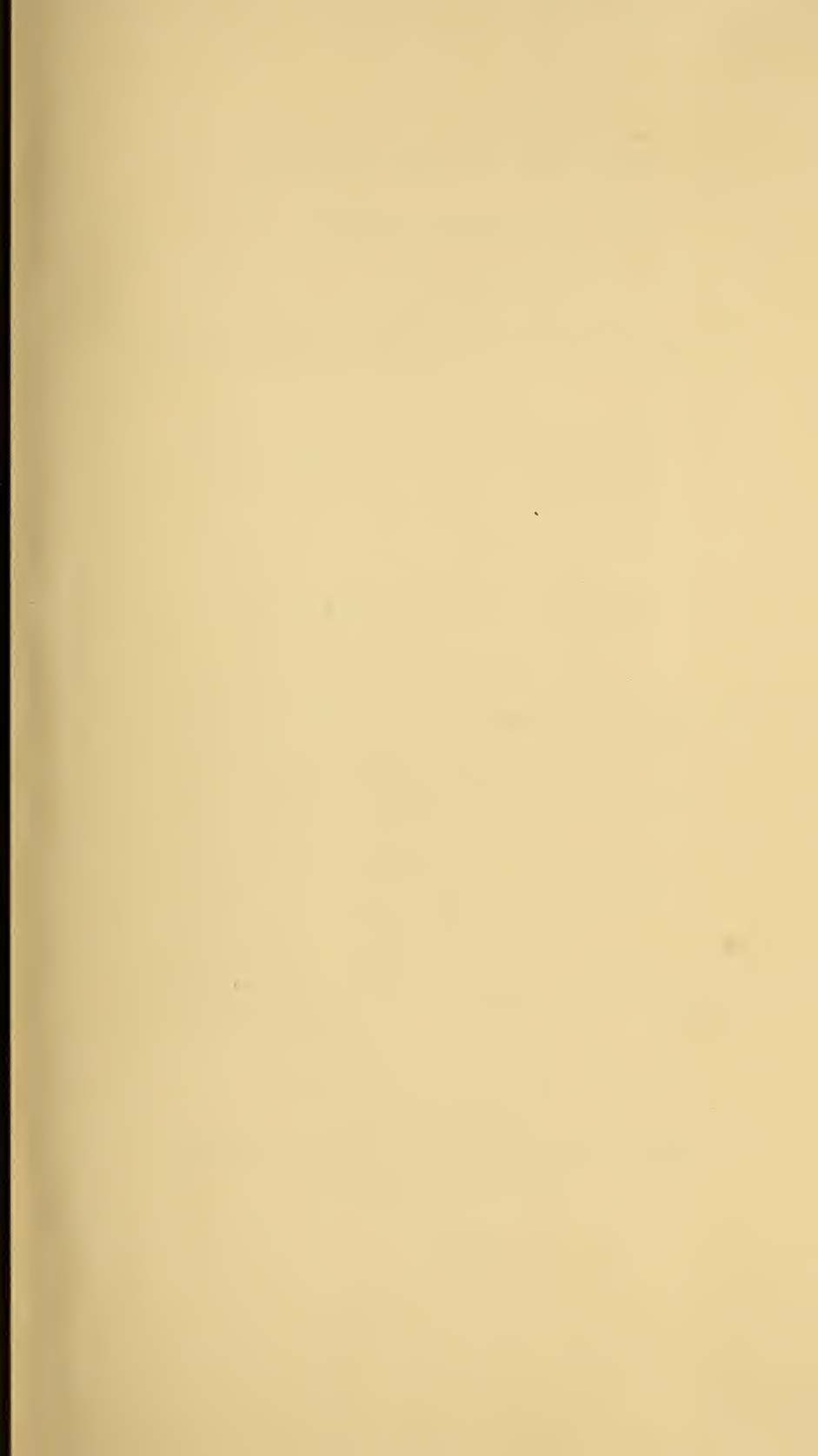




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Book 1 S5





THOUGHTS,
CHIEFLY DESIGNED
AS
PREPARATIVE OR PERSUASIVE
TO
PRIVATE DEVOTION.

BY
JOHN SHEPPARD,

AUTHOR OF

“THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY, DEDUCED FROM
SOME OF THOSE EVIDENCES WHICH ARE NOT
FOUNDED ON THE AUTHENTICITY
OF SCRIPTURE.”

SIXTH EDITION.

“La meditation n'est pas l'oraison; mais elle en est le
fondement essentiel.”

FENELON.

LONDON:
WHITTAKER, TREACHER, AND Co.
AVE-MARIA-LANE.

1832.

BV4815

S5

LONDON:

HENRY BAYLIS, JOHNSON'S-COURT, FLEET-STREET.

TO MY MOTHER.*

OH thou, that in some far off realm of rest
With kindred spirits waitest, till the voice
Of Seraphim invite to loftier joys
And brighter mansions,—thou maternal soul,
Maternal as the form in which thou cam'st
With daily love to greet me, till the embrace
Of death, that welcome envoy to the just,
Withdrew thee gently from thy near abode,—
Thou wouldst not have me *dedicate* my page
Save to that Lord whom all thy powers obey'd:
And mine—far less devoted—shall aspire

* Who marked in the first edition many passages which she preferred; and departed this life April 2, 1824.

To such true dedication ;—but 'tis meet,—
 'Tis the permitted solace memory claims ;
 'Tis in accordance with thy Lord's command ;
 'Tis but to honour feebly her whose crown
 Of righteous years would I had honoured more,—
 To *inscribe* the page to thee.

Though friendship seal
 These thoughts with her approval, and the mind
 Of good men yield a suffrage which perchance
 Nurtures too much the teeming root of pride,
 —Nay, had each plume that intellect and taste
 And pure devotion point, enhanc'd their praise,—
 All *ought* to be less treasur'd than these marks,
 Trac'd with a simple pencil, by the hand
 Of a fond parent ;—whose enfeebled sight
 And pious lips bent o'er the filial line
 Unwearied ; uttering praise for life prolong'd,
 Because, in its last wintry weeks, I bore
 This volume to her solitude ; where oft
 Her pleas'd affection still its leaves review'd ;
 Till death, unclasping heaven's eternal book,
 Shew'd the deep indigence of earthly thought,—
 By that contrasted splendour quite reveal'd !

This hand enfolded mine, while helplessly,
 In mute instinctive fondness, yet I hung
 Upon thy bosom ; it sustain'd my course
 Yet unassured and tottering ; from the lips
 Of infancy it wip'd off many a gush
 Of fear and sorrow ; from the school-child's eye,
 Oppress'd by tasks impos'd, with downcast gaze
 Foreboding inability and scorn,
 It dried the trembling drop, while soothing words
 Pour'd all a mother's comforts through the heart.
 —Nor less maternal as it feebler grew ;
 For e'en in latest months its tender grasp
 Upheld the giddy steps and help'd the sports
 Of children's children, nor would own the toil.

True—'twas untaught to wake melodious wires,
 And to compose the pallet's artful hues
 With shadowing skill ; but often, though unnerv'd
 By long infirmity, would still transcribe
 In lonely hours, with diligent delight,
 The hallow'd numbers of some Christian bard ;
 Or periods where the love of God and man
 Had glow'd from consecrated tongue.

Even when
 The swiftly liberating angel came,—
 It seem'd his solemn embassy had staid
 For thy last labour: the yet recent task
 Of that dear hand,—which, at the setting sun,
 Sank paralyz'd, until it rise from dust
 In deathless honour,—was a task of love.
 It pen'd the fervent wish, the genuine prayer
 Of “charity,” to a far sever'd friend
 In Asia's island groves;* it cheered her zeal

* This excellent and amiable friend, Mrs. Burton, partner (in the best sense) of the Rev. R. Burton—then a Missionary in Sumatra, afterwards in Hindostan,—has since “rested from her labours,” leaving memorials of her friendship, zeal, and benevolence, in many Christian hearts.—While the fifth edition of this work was reprinting, the painful news arrived of Mr. B.'s decease, at Patna, in Sept. 1828. In him the cause of Missions has lost a much esteemed promoter, and two infant orphans (in England) a remaining parent. But “the God of all grace,” and “Father of the fatherless,” who has ordained that his servants should be “not divided” longer, can overrule each public and private bereavement to the happiest ends. Some notices of the characters and exertions both of Mr. and Mrs. B. have since been published by the writer of these pages, in “Two Discourses, occasioned by the deaths of the Rev. E. C. Daneill, and the Rev. R. Burton.”

Whittaker, and Co. 1829.

For works of self-denying mercy there ;
 And beckon'd toward that haven of the blest,
 Where saints whom centuries and seas divide
 Shall join in endless harmony.

Thy soul

Was musical, though jarred by early griefs ;
 —Elastic heaven-ward, although press'd with care ;—
 And when its fond solitudes for all
 It loved were lull'd awhile, it rose full fain
 To high and holy musings: following up
 The flight of stronger souls, as if nought lack'd
 But a new wing, to bear it to the skies.

Now the new wing is given ; and thou dost turn
 With smiling wonder back to "thoughts" like these,
 So dark,—so infantine,—so unenlarg'd—
 So feeble to the emancipated strength
 Of heavenly knowledge and immortal joy !

Oh ! be the chalice of thy joy but crown'd
 With this sweet foresight,—that thine offspring soon
 And whom they cherish, shall ascend to share

Thy bright maturity of saintly bliss :
Kept by his mighty power who "car'd for thee,"
—Midst thousand snares, and countless wanderings,
By Him that guides, and chastens, and restores,—
Till from this tearful brief mortality
They rise, to mingle in thy faultless song !

P R E F A C E.

HE who would produce what may profit others by influencing their mental state and disposition, must be guided chiefly by what he judges and feels the most adapted to benefit himself. In attempting to provide succours for moral and spiritual disorders and weaknesses, we can make no preparatory researches analogous to those of the surgeon, when he gains hints for the relief of disease from the anatomy of morbid subjects. We may, indeed, learn something from confidential intercourse; but although we were depositaries of auricular confession, still the most intimate and

analytical knowledge of the heart must be gained by the inspection of our own. This, in intellectual and moral anatomy, is the only *subject* to which we have free and full access. Even here, the mischief is too abstruse for us ; insomuch, that a sacred writer has exclaimed, “ Who can know it ! ” And if it be thus with our own hearts, how much more must it be with those of others, which, in many respects, are so much less open to our view.

Consequently, in the choice and management of moral and spiritual topics, we cannot expect to offer what is *best* except for a certain class ; *i. e.* for those who as to internal character most resemble ourselves.

It is hoped that the following Thoughts may conduce to strengthen the principle and assist the engagements of piety, in some minds of the reflective and *questioning* class, not sanguine in temperament, “ strong in faith,” or “ filled with joy.”

If this hope be reasonable, they ought not to be withholden from an apprehension of critical or theological strictures ; because the most moderate probability of usefulness, as to interests which are incalculable, might well justify a far graver hazard.

It may also be remarked, that only to the class above-mentioned will *any* religious helps, besides the Sacred Scriptures,* be very acceptable, as such. Christians of a higher and a happier order have better internal resources for awakening and enlarging devout sentiments and affections ; a few words from the treasury of scripture, remembered or sought according to the impressions and occasions of the hour, may conduct such into a course of spontaneous thought, far more interesting and beneficial to them than printed pages can offer.

Some of these papers are on subjects so elementary in theology and in devotion, that the

* To which every Christian will account all religious helps merely secondary and supplemental.

charge of triteness may be incurred both as to their selection and their treatment. It can only be answered, that in proportion to their commonness is their essential importance, and that if similar thoughts have been often more fully and forcibly developed in systematic treatises or complete discourses, they are here offered in a brief and less regular form, which is more consonant with the leading design of this volume.*

On the other hand, it was not in the writer's plan to debar himself from all ideas and expressions which would be misplaced in a tract or discourse entirely popular ;† nor could this require to be noticed, were it not that the title indicates a general use. No other, however, appeared so com-

* Two Pieces were added to the second edition,—Nos. xxiii. and xxiv., besides the Note A, and the Postscript to Note F. To the third edition were added, No. xxv. and the Note G. To the fourth edition, an Alphabetical Index was annexed.

† The notes appended are not necessary to the pieces which have given occasion to them. They are chiefly designed for

pendiously descriptive of the object which is chiefly pursued.

In several pieces a larger share of citation has been inserted than is usual in the popular religious works of our day ; but as this is drawn from writers of acknowledged excellence, it is believed that if the judicious reader find it appositely introduced, there will be no portion of the volume which he would less wish excluded.

There is something displeasing to the writer in that seeming egotism, or obtrusion of personal feeling on the public, which attaches to what is composed in the manner of private reflection ; yet, as this manner seems, in some instances, best suited to the primary use of the work, it has not, where it naturally occurred, been declined or altered.

the more literate class of readers, and may be best perused apart. In some of them, such readers will feel an especial interest, on account of the characters to whom they relate.

Entertaining a regard for the sincere and devout of various Christian communions, which, whatever be its strength or weakness, is, if he know himself, unfeignedly impartial, the author of these "Thoughts" has much satisfaction in the hope that they can excite no prejudice in those who differ on subordinate points, if happily agreed concerning the great facts and doctrines of our "most holy faith."

Several incidental occasions have been taken of glancing at the *evidences* by which that faith is supported; chiefly however at those of the indirect or presumptive kind. In former editions a design was intimated of treating this important subject more generally. That design has been since pursued, and in some sort fulfilled;* not indeed in the manner originally contemplated ("by Essays

* In two volumes, entitled, "The Divine Origin of Christianity, deduced from some of those Evidences which are *not* founded on the Authenticity of Scripture."—*Whittaker and Co.*, 1829.

abstracted from the treatises of distinguished authors," &c.), because it appeared, after more deliberation, preferable "to take a single department," and to pursue "my own order of thought, while freely using, and distinctly acknowledging, the assistance of others."* In the Introduction to that work the change of plan is noticed, and the reasons of my preference are explained.*

It is published uniformly with the present volume; and though necessarily of a very different character, may, it is hoped, by the divine blessing, be rendered conducive, in its measure, to the same great purpose.

* Divine Origin. Introd. p. xxi.

Frome, March, 1832.

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I.

ON A RIGHT SENSE OF THE DIVINE GREATNESS.

“HE that cometh to God, must believe that he is.”—How indisputable and self-evident a truth is this, that *real* worship implies a belief in the existence of its object; and yet have not I sometimes addressed the Deity with such carelessness and irreverence of mind as might well induce doubts whether I had any sense of that adorable majesty, that infinite grandeur which is essential to the Perfect Being, the Maker and Upholder of all things; consequently, whether I had any proper belief that He *is*, and whether my worship were any thing more than a compliance with some indistinct apprehension that he *may* be? It is true, no finite no created mind, however superior to the

human, can contemplate or worship the incomprehensible God *as* He is ; but, on the other hand, no mind, however feeble and limited, can *really* think of a Being who hath “ stretched forth the heavens,” and “ established the earth,” without a profound impression of his greatness. If, therefore, I “ come to God, believing that he is,” I must come with a sentiment of deep veneration, with a solemn sense of his attributes. If this be wanting, my belief in his being must for the time be regarded as in a state of suspension or dormancy, and I come not unto *Him*, but to a sort of sign or name existing in my thought, utterly inadequate to represent, even to the lowest capacity, Him whom it signifies. This may admit of illustration from the sublimest kind of idolatry, the worship of the sun. If we could suppose a worshipper of that luminary to acquire the knowledge of its magnitude and distance which our astronomy teaches, and yet to retain the belief of its divinity, regarding it as the corporeal vehicle of a glorious and beneficent spirit, the adoring wonder of this individual would be expected greatly to exceed that of persons who had no conception of the true grandeur of their idol ; but it would exceed, probably, just in proportion to the degree in which he actually *considered* the matter of his superior knowledge,

namely, the vast spaces through which the solar light and heat are diffused, the dimension of the sun itself, and the immensity of its sensible influence; with the correspondent immensity of the supposed spirit dwelling in all its sphere and in all its emanations.

Another worshipper, destitute of astronomical knowledge, but who had been an admiring observer of the facts and appearances which lie open to all, might carry with him, if he were more intently meditating on these, a deeper sentiment of veneration to the place and hour of prayer.—If in vivid thought he pursued the seeming career of this god of day through the circuit of heaven; if he dwelt on the splendour of his rising, and the mild, ever-varied beauties of his setting; if he pictured to himself the expansion of cheering and fructifying rays over whole continents, and then tried to form a conception of the multitude of living creatures awakened and gladdened daily by those rays, and of the still greater multitude of herbs and flowers opening to their visitation, and imbibing from them life and beauty,—this employment of mind, though not accompanied with so accurate a knowledge, would, doubtless, if more active and intent than that of the former, produce more suitable feelings. We may suppose both these to be

worshippers at midnight, or after the light of their imagined divinity is withdrawn, so that their sentiments or contemplations cannot be immediately derived from outward perception.

We may conceive also a third idolater, who at the same hour having been habituated to prayer, engages in it like the others, not perhaps without some sincerity of desire ; but, not having been at all accustomed to the contemplation of nature, or not feeling the importance of realizing the attributes of the object adored, he has no distinct thought concerning them. The only idea of the solar orb presented to his mind, is either the written name and title of the divinity, or the golden similitude of it which decorates his temple. Although he has an indistinct sense of his own necessities, and some apprehension, still more vague, of the greatness of the object worshipped, little else is really or clearly set before the mind than either a mere arbitrary name, or else the very weak and petty resemblance which human art has formed.

It is true that even the first of those supposed worshippers does not adore the sun *as* he is, because the bulk of that heavenly body, and its distance, small as they are in comparison with the extent of creation, are far too great for the human

mind distinctly to apprehend ; they are objects of calculation, but not properly objects of conception ;—and the second, however actively and poetically his thoughts may expatiate, cannot conceive at once any assignable portion of the sun's unnumbered influences on the individuals of the animal and vegetable world. But still the preparation for worship in the minds of both these persons will be acknowledged to be incomparably better than in that of the third. This last can hardly be said to believe that the *sun* exists. He believes in the existence of something so *called* ; but not investing this object by steadfast contemplation with any of its attributes, the belief seems rather to be in a sign than in that which is signified.

Has not my worship of the infinitely glorious Creator, sometimes, for want of preparatory thoughts of his majesty, partaken of this character ?—

Bethink thee, slumberer, *whom* thou would'st adore !
Not that illustrious idol ; but the Power
Who lighted up its lustre ; in whose grasp
The fancied God, by sages idoliz'd
That knew not half its grandeur, the vast orb
Whose bright diameter a hundred earths
Would scanty measure, is but as a lamp ;
One midst the countless lamps his hand upholds

And feeds with brightness.—From this solar lamp
Whose shining mass a million fold exceeds
Our “atom world,” yet by remoteness shrinks
To a mere disk, *He* bids the radiance fall
On every rolling mountain of the floods,
On every trembling drop that gems the plains ;
Tinge with its rosy touch the giant peaks
Of the firm Andes, and the bending cup
Of the minutest flower ; exhale at morn
The dews that fertilize a hemisphere,
And dry some swift ephemeron’s folded wing ;
Blaze in its torrid strength o’er sandy zones,
Yet cheer the living microscopic mote
Which flutters in its glow.—Thou worship’st Him
Who fix’d this gorgeous lamp, but who can quench
And *spare* its splendour ; can reveal his works
And bless them, were that orb extinct, and heaven
Grown starless at his word : who when he made
Thee, conscious spirit, of the Eternal Mind
Reflective, wrought a work more marvellous,
More sumptuous, than a galaxy of suns !
He is the Sun of spirits, and his beams
Of all-pervading, all-awakening thought,
Irradiate every angel’s intellect,
Yet touch with gentlest light an infant soul !

II.

ON THE OMNIPRESENCE OF DEITY.

IT is an astonishing thought, yet strictly deducible from the being of God, that He who made and sustains the universe, has an universal and unceasing agency ; therefore an universal and unceasing presence with all that He hath made. To imagine a point of space, or instant of time from which the agency of God is excluded, would be to imagine something independent of Him ; it would be to think of Him as finite, to limit his empire, and, by denying his perfection, virtually to deny his existence. He who efficiently *acts* every where, *is* every where. The Deity acts indeed by innumerable instruments, or causes them to act mediately, and often reciprocally, on each other ; but each one of

these instruments, whether spiritual or material, must be held in existence by his efficient and immediate agency, which implies his perpetual presence. Angels may fulfil “his commandment” in the remotest regions of the creation; but who “holdeth their soul in life?”* None assuredly but a present God. The sacred Scriptures fully announce this truth, and the apostle expressed it in terms the most accurate as well as sublime, when he declared to the Athenian idolaters, “*In him we live, and move, and are.*” It is no slight presumption of the divinity of the Hebrews’ religion, that this people, amidst the gross and contracted notions of the surrounding heathen, and with no sound human philosophy to enlarge their own, entertained the idea of an all-comprehending Godhead. Not that this idea excluded that of a local *manifestation* of the Deity, a place and an appearance in which he peculiarly shews forth his glory; without the idea of such a manifestation, we could scarcely conceive the personality, and still less the promised vision, of the Divine Being. The Scriptures every where speak of a heavenly throne, a place where the glorious and beatific presence of Deity is peculiarly displayed; the *centre*, if we may speak so, of that

* Psalm lxvi. 9.

presence which is universal and boundless. To this celestial throne, prayer is often figuratively considered as being addressed, and there the Deity is in like manner represented as acting. Thus Isaiah entreats ; “ Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and of thy glory ;” and the Old Testament abounds with similiar language : it is often used also by our Saviour himself, who speaks in many of his discourses, of God as “ our Father which is in heaven,” and dictates an invocation in the same form. But such language could never be designed to weaken our conviction or remembrance that the intimate presence of Deity is as real, as necessary, as perpetual, in every part of the universe, as it is on that throne before which archangels bow. Those sacred writers who used phrases the most distinctly indicating a local residence of the divine glory, were not the less strongly imbued with a solemn persuasion of this divine omnipresence. The same David who writes, —“ The Lord is in his holy temple ; the Lord’s throne is in heaven,” —inquires in one of his noblest odes, “ Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence ?” and describes with poetic sublimity the attribute which is “ too wonderful” for him. Solomon, who repeatedly introduces this form of supplication, —“ Hear

thou in heaven thy dwelling place,"* acknowledges at the commencement of his petitions, "Behold the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee." That Divine Teacher, who so often reminds us of the mercies of our "Father which is in heaven," enjoins us to pray in the solitude of the closet to our "Father who seeth in secret." No divine attribute is more readily or more necessarily admitted by us, whether we consult reason or scripture, than this of omnipresence;—but is it at the same time realized (we will not say in a degree at all proportioned to its importance, but) even in an equal degree with the other perfections which we ascribe to the Deity? From the slight impression which it frequently makes, one would infer that it cannot be so. For what thought can be calculated to strike the mind more deeply and powerfully, than that of an ever-present God?—And without a lively conviction of this truth, how greatly the force of the whole revelation concerning the divine character is neutralized! We may acknowledge the abstract justice, purity, and compassion of Jehovah, but unless we really apprehend his omnipresence, there can be no imperative check to sin, nor any substantial confidence in devotion. If in the hour

* 1 Kings, viii. *passim*.

of sinful indulgence, or cold meditation, or listless worship, we could awake from our spiritual slumber, as Jacob awoke from his bodily sleep at Bethel, into the strong sense of this momentous fact,—should we not exclaim with as much awe as he did, “ Surely Jehovah is in this place, and I *knew* it not !—*This* is none other than the house of God, and *this* is the gate of heaven !”

As yet, indeed, we are not summoned into the central apartment of his palace, who is “ the blessed and only Potentate ;”—we are not yet in the Holy of holies, the inner court of the temple of God above ;—but his palace, his temple, is the universe ; the worlds are our “ Father’s house.” We are in the ante-room, in the outer courts, already. “ The King immortal, invisible,” “ is not far from any one of us,” veiled by the symbols of his own “ eternal power and godhead.” We can be in no place, while conscious of the existence of our body and mind, without ascertaining the uninterrupted continuance of the agency and presence of God ; for this body, and this mind, although the whole fabric of nature were concealed from us, would demonstrate a supporting Deity. We walk then, as it were, in a secret chamber, whether in the field at eventide, or in the closet, or in the house of prayer ; He who “ filleth heaven and earth,” Jehovah, the

infinite Spirit, is with us, though unseen.—And it is a chamber of audience. “The God of the spirits of all flesh” is actually and graciously “*nigh* unto all that *call* upon Him.” Indeed these are but weak figures to describe the nearness of Him in whom “we have our being,” who “is,” as a Divine has expressed it, “the soul of our soul.” “We seem as if alone” (he adds) “in that interior sanctuary, but God is there more intimately than we.”

This truth obviously affords a most complete encouragement (the moral attributes of God being first acknowledged) to every kind of worship, and quite as much to silent mental prayer as to any other. Nothing but the belief of God’s real omnipresence can make it any way rational to conclude, that the loudest prayers or adorations, whether of individuals or of multitudes, in different places, are heard and understood by Him ; and the very same belief is alone necessary, in order to be assured, not only that He observes the whispered petition, the gesture or the sigh which expresses thought and desire, but even the thought or desire itself which no sign of any kind accompanies. That would be a very low and unworthy conception of the divine nature, (beseeming those devotees of Baal whom the prophet so bitterly reproved,) by which the Deity should be imagined to understand the

thoughts and desires of his creatures only through the medium of signs, whether verbal or otherwise. We are apt to attribute to the signs of thought an importance which is not at all essential to them, but which arises, great as it is to *us*, merely out of our own imperfection. Thought, when unrecorded, still more when unuttered, is, to us, an evanescent thing ; which, from its fugitive, unfixed character, seems hardly to have a real subsistence. And hence proceeds much illusion, both with regard to the extent of our moral responsibility, and the nature of prayer. It is not only our imperfection which needs these signs, but they are likewise, although to us most precious, exceedingly imperfect in themselves. Language dies in the very utterance. Inscriptions even on brass and marble perish. Writings and books, the most valuable repositories of thought, are more perishing still, and can only be perpetuated by renewal. Thus none of those symbols of thought, on which all our present knowledge, even the knowledge of a Saviour and of eternal life, depends, (and which therefore may be regarded as the best gifts of God's providence,) are permanent or indelible. *They*, on the contrary, are the truly evanescent things. When "the earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up," those *works* in which

the thoughts of human genius and erudition have been for ages treasured, and as it were, embalmed, will become fuel for that awful pile, as many like them have already perished in lesser conflagrations, and by other modes of destruction. We know not that even the records of revelation will be excepted from this doom. But when all mortal signs both of error and of truth are effaced, truth will remain perfect and unchanged in the Divine Mind, where also every thought of every thinking being must eternally dwell, or at least can be obliterated by no cause except the divine volition. It would be a denial of God's omniscience, a supposition of imperfection in the Deity, not to believe this.

We are not, however, hence to infer that prolonged silent or mental prayer is usually desirable for us, even in secret. On account of our weak and limited nature, it is probably, for the most part, not so. The utterance of words contributes to fix and form our thoughts, to give them order and connexion, and even to affect our hearts more deeply; we recognize more fully by this means the reality and continuity of prayer, and are more guarded against its distractions and inconstancies. Yet the firm persuasion that mental prayer is effective, and that we may really address an ever-present

God, like that devout petitioner who “spake in her heart,” (even although our “lips” should not “move,” as did hers,) is of great value, as encouraging a habit which can make every place and scene an *oratory* ; a habit also which will best prepare us for those last moments or hours of earthly devotion,—we trust by far the most fervent and most blest,—when the tongue, the lip, the hand, the eye, shall successively fail in their weak and transient offices, but when the spirit shall more closely commune with Him, as our Father, “who hath come unto us, and made his abode with us.”—Meanwhile, it is not enough that God be with *us* ; in order to the happiness and life of our souls, we must seek to be more and more in purpose and in spirit with *Him*. The divine presence surrounds and pervades an image, a plant, an irrational animal, a sensual human being, who, though endowed with reason, and capable of immortal blessedness in the knowledge and love of his Creator, is yet living “*without* God in the world.” This is enough for the inanimate and the irrational, for it is all of which, as far as we can tell, their nature admits ; but surely it is not enough for the human nature, which is conscious to itself, when enlightened and awake, as soon it *must* be, of desires and capacities infinitely higher. Let us be grateful for the

sustaining presence of God ; but if we would not forfeit the noblest privilege of our being, and incur a loss which is awfully irreparable, we must seek that *gracious* presence, that happy intimacy and communion with our Maker and Redeemer, which is the true felicity of a spirit. We must pray that the feelings and faculties of our souls may be increasingly “*alive* unto God through Jesus Christ ;” that we may exercise, in a growing measure, the confidence and love which his presence and his perfections excite in the glorified ; that we may be able to say not merely “*in* Him we live,”—but *for* Him and *unto* Him we live ; not merely “*in* Him we move,” whether physically or intellectually,—but *towards* Him is the supreme, the willing movement of our affections and desires ; not only “*in* Him we have our *being*,” but in Him our hope, in Him our happiness ; so that we can no otherwise think of a present or a future *well-being*, than in the enjoyment of filial union with our Father and our God.

III.

ON THE EFFICACY OF PRAYER.

ONLY so far as the unbelief of my heart questions the truth or divine authority of that volume which every where encourages and inculcates the duty, can I consistently question the power and efficacy of prayer to God. Unless the recorded success of those devout persons, whose fervent and prevailing prayers the scripture mentions, be fabulous or imaginary ; unless the prophets have falsely pronounced the following as messages of the Most High,—“ I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them ;”* “ While they are yet speaking, I will hear ;”† “ Whosoever

* Ezekiel, xxxvi. 37.

† Isaiah, lxv. 24.

shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered ;”* “ He will be very gracious unto thee at the voice of thy cry ; when he shall hear it, he will answer thee :”† —then the true worshippers of the true God have *always* had reason to confide in the success of their supplications. And since the coming of our Saviour, the grounds of this confidence have been rendered still more explicit and satisfactory ; for, unless Christ himself was in error, or designed to mislead others, when he enjoined so urgently and repeatedly the duty of constant, persevering, and importunate prayer, when he recommended it by his own example, when he uttered the declaration of its *universal* success, “ *Every one* that asketh, receiveth ;” then we have the strongest assurances that God is verily “plenteous in mercy to all them that call upon him.” This belief is inseparable from the simple belief of revelation. Except, therefore, I am unhappily and presumptuously inclined to renounce or to explain away the revealed truth of God, and with it the substantial and enduring hope of man, on account of certain metaphysical difficulties which may be raised on this subject, I must endeavour to engage in the duty of prayer with a firm convic-

* Joel, ii. 32.

† Isaiah, xxx. 19.

tion that it shall never be *in vain*. But indeed those difficulties, arising from our unavoidable belief of the “determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God,” have in themselves no weight. My doubting, or slothful, or desponding temper of mind may suggest,—How can I hope to move or influence an unchangeable Being? “The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of his heart to all generations.” As reasonably might it be asked,—How can I hope, by taking food, to renew my strength, or prolong my life; or, by applying to the physician, to obtain the removal of disease? God hath foreseen and appointed the term of my life, and the measure of my health and strength.

In these cases the absurdity of the objection is at once apparent. The means by which health is to be restored, strength sustained, and life preserved, are as much objects of the divine foreknowledge and counsel as the ends connected with them. It hath pleased the Divine Providence to connect them; and the one will not be without the other. So it hath pleased God, as we learn distinctly from his revealed declarations, to connect the reception of spiritual blessings with prayer; the real welfare and prosperity of man with supplication to the Author of every good and perfect

gift. They are as strictly united as knowledge is with study, or the continuance of life with the use of food. It is no more philosophical to doubt the efficacy and the consequence of the one means than of the other.

But am I then to expect a special answer to every petition? Are my requests in prayer to be fulfilled without delay or disappointment? This depends on the character and terms of the requests themselves, and the conditions or reservations under which they are made. It would be not only unchristian, but irrational, for so short-sighted a creature as I am, to pray, absolutely, for *any temporal* possession or event, or even for the immediate communication of *some spiritual* benefits. If any thing be more certain than another, it is that I cannot foresee the effect of outward things upon my real good; nor do I even know what present state of mind and feeling will best promote my ultimate happiness. All a Christian's prayers, therefore, except for things which are universally and immutably good, ought to be quite conditional. They should be so with respect to the best of temporal blessings, such as the life of those most dear to me, and my own health. And they should be so even with regard to present spiritual enjoyments, such as a sensible experience of the

Divine favour, or a full assurance and prelibation of future bliss. In all petitions for these, there must be a submissive reference of our most earnest desires to the wisdom and mercy of Him who knoweth all things, that they may be graciously imparted, or graciously denied. And if this be not distinct enough, either in our words or in our thoughts, we must conclude, when our desires remain unfulfilled, that our heavenly Father kindly interpreted those prayers as conditional, which in temper and language were too absolute. We must believe him to say, in the refusal or postponement of our request,—My son, if thou hadst meditated more on my perfections and thy own condition, thou wouldst have added, like him who suffered for thee, “ Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt ;” and *thus*, in love to thee, for the sake of that illustrious Sufferer, I have treated thy prayer.

Our heavenly Father has promised to “ give *good* things to them that ask him ;” * *i. e.* to give at all times those things which are *always* good for man, in measures proportioned to the earnestness and frequency of the request ; and to give those things, which are only good at certain periods, and for certain states of character, only when they thus

* Matthew, vii. 11.

become “good things.” If this could be otherwise, we must suppose the All-wise and All-gracious God to give, not “good things” to them that ask him, but things which they *erroneously suppose* to be good for them. This would be fearfully contrary to the Divine attributes and to our welfare. It is evident, that the spirit of our prayers, and our hopes as to their efficacy, should be regulated by these considerations.

But there *are* petitions which may be *always* unconditionally presented; such as for the influence of the Holy Spirit in general, for victory over sin, and growth in holiness; more particularly for strength in the fulfilment of known duty, for direction in doubt and difficulty where our duty is concerned, for help to exercise each Christian temper and grace, for deliverance from every evil disposition, for increasing conformity to Christ, and faith and love towards him. Even to *these* petitions I am not to expect sudden, complete, or sensible answers: this would be putting an end to my state of trial, and would be manifestly at variance with the order of God’s moral government. The efficacy of these prayers is sufficiently evinced, if there be, on the whole, a progress in the attainments desired; and it is not disproved by occasional declension, whether seeming or real,

any more than the efficacy of food is disproved by occasional debility or disease. Probably I ought to ascribe, much more fully and strictly than I do, whatever right inclinations, or purposes, or habits I am conscious of, to the direct efficacy of my daily petitions for spiritual good. They should be considered not only in a general manner as gifts of the divine grace, but as particular answers to my entreaties for that grace; supplies immediately connected with my renewed requests. It is true, I have even now cause to be profoundly humbled at the experience of evil in my heart and life; but, were it supposable, that, without apostacy, and through perversion of the understanding rather than of the will or affections, I might be induced henceforth to restrain or renounce all prayer, there is every reason to conclude that my spiritual state would thus be awfully deteriorated; that good wishes and designs would be speedily weakened and suppressed; that evil passions would gain strength; that the doubts which even now assault me would triumph, and exclude comfort from the soul; that my confidence in God would utterly fail; that I might be betrayed into some dreadful and irrecoverable fall, prompted by a criminal inclination or a despairing mind. We read of persons who “draw back unto perdition,”

—“ abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate,”—who “ are altogether become filthy,”—who “ search out iniquities,” and “ encourage themselves in evil,”—who say, “ in their heart, there is no God.” We see these scriptural statements verified in the dreadful example of some around us, in every class of society. These are men who never have truly prayed, or who have renounced prayer. And to what but prayer as a mean, an essential and efficacious mean, because so appointed by the Father of mercies, shall I mainly attribute my preservation from this wretched state? It ought to be ascribed with the deepest gratitude to the mercy of Him who “ heareth us always,” that I, who am so fallible, so weak, so sinful, whose heart is “ deceitful above all things, and grievously infirm,”* have still been enabled to “ continue” in prayer ; and have received a portion of those succours which prayer procures, far greater than from the unbelief and languor of my approaches to God might have been expected. All these considerations should most powerfully operate

* The deplorable fact of its “ wickedness,” as stated in our common version of Jeremiah xvii. 9, is one to which the most conscientious self-observers have set their seal ; but the version itself does not appear critically faithful. See Parkhurst and Simon on the word אָנָשׁ.

to lead me constantly, with devoted praise and believing supplication, to his throne of grace, that I may still “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

IV.

ON APATHY AND DEADNESS RESPECTING REVEALED TRUTH.

I EXPERIENCE at present an utter averseness and reluctance to meditation and prayer. But is this a reason why I should refrain from these duties, or defer them? Surely not; for my state of feeling implies a blindness with regard to the highest truths, and interests, and expectations, which it is most essential to my spiritual safety and happiness should be removed; and by what means can I promote its removal, except by sedulously exercising my thoughts in order to the excitement of my affections, and to the effectual solicitation of divine aid? “Many are hindered, (says a foreign theologian, quoted by Baxter,) because they refuse to give themselves to prayer or meditation,

except they feel themselves brought to it by devotion ; and except it be when these duties delight them, and go to their hearts ; otherwise all seems to them unprofitable. But this kind of men are like him, that being vexed with cold, will not go to the fire except he were first warm ; or like one that is ready to perish with famine, and will not ask meat, except he were first satisfied. For why doth a man give himself to prayer or meditation, but that he might be warmed with the fire of divine love ? or, that he may be filled with the gifts and grace of God ? These men are mistaken, in thinking the time lost in prayer or meditation, if they be not presently watered with a shower of devotion ; for I answer them, that if they strive as much as in them lieth for this, and do their duty, and are in war, and in continual fight against their own thoughts, with displeasure because they depart not, nor suffer them to be quiet, such men for this time are more accepted, than if the heat and devotion had come to them suddenly, without any such conflict.”*

I perceive the justness of these arguments ; and have the more need to be practically influenced by them, inasmuch as I am not merely like one so

* Gerson.

situated that food will not be brought him if he be too slothful to seek it, but like one whose appetite is impaired; not merely like one "*vexed* with cold," but like one beginning to be *motionless* with cold, in whom sensation is partly blunted.—Rouse thyself, oh my soul, from this spiritual lethargy! Remember that thy weak indifference cannot produce even the minutest change or intermission in the sleepless course of things. Still, amidst seeming rest and inertness, the solid earth is rolling on its axis, and rushing through space.—Every planet flies with undeclining velocity through its vast orbit.—The pulses of animal life vibrate in thy frame, and its vital fluid incessantly circulates, while thy spiritual life is stagnating.—At every moment, unnumbered beings make their entrance into time, and a multitude take their flight into eternity.—The infinite energy of the Eternal Mind is awake to all the events of his universe, and governing them all.—The praises and melodies of heaven are unsuspended.—The laments of the miserable are wakeful and unassuaged.—The ever-prevailing Mediator continually intercedes.—The day of thy summons into an unknown world, swiftly approaches by the unceasing lapse of time; and every little section of the dial or the watch, which the shadow or the index traverses, is a por-

tion of thy unintermitted (never to be intermitted) progress towards the home of spirits.—“Behold, the Judge standeth before the door.”—It will be but a transient succession, a swift continuation of hours and minutes, and thou shalt have to look back upon the consummation of terrestrial things, upon the awful disclosures and decisions of the great retributive day, upon the moment when thy own character, as viewed by the Searcher of hearts, stood first revealed, and with it thy allotment in a new untried existence!—And now, while those scenes are yet future, every action, every temper, every purpose and bias of the mind, is to be regarded as a sowing for an eternal harvest. The influences of heaven, even of the Almighty and All-holy Spirit, are offered to him that implores them, and are able to produce in the soul, “fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.” A celestial and endless blessedness is set before thy faith, with every solemn promise and mighty work of Christ to guarantee its reality; and he who is gone to “prepare a place” for his followers, has engaged to come again and receive them to himself.

And is there all this animated activity in the creatures and operations of God?—All this beneficent energy in him who preserves and actuates

them?—All this restless rapidity in the flight of time, and the progress of events and dispensations towards their final period?—All this growing nearness, and amplitude, and splendour in the prospects of eternity? Do the records of revelation meanwhile offer to me the exhaustless fountain of spiritual good, proclaiming, “Ask, and ye shall receive?”—Does he that died for me utter the awakening words, “Behold, I come quickly,—hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown;”—“him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God?” And can I be languid and listless in the midst of these facts and these incitements? If they fail to move and stimulate my desire or fear, if, through deep stupor and somnolency of spirit, I am not affected or awakened by such thoughts, then how indispensable and urgent the necessity of solemnly applying (in however broken a manner) to the Father of mercies, entreating that he would dissolve the spell which binds my soul; lest at length “the thunder of his power” should rend it, and present to my view, not the mild light of grace, but the “fiery stream” of judgment, where “the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his holy One for a flame!”

V.

ON THE IMPERFECTION OF ALL HUMAN THOUGHT AND LANGUAGE IN THE VIEW OF THE CREATOR.

A VAST mountain, a range of perpendicular cliffs, are objects that powerfully excite in us the idea of grandeur. They are among the sublimest objects within the near scope and measurement of our senses, and it seems to be chiefly from comparing them with those less things to which our near view is usually directed, and particularly with the minuteness and feebleness of our own bodily structure, that we gain this impression of their stability and greatness. For we know, on reflection, that the grandeur, even of the Himalayan mountains, is merely relative; and that all the different inequalities of our earth's surface are, proportion-

ally to its magnitude, but as the greater and smaller grains of sand or dust, differing a little in size and aggregation, which might be strewn and cemented on the surface of our artificial globes.

So there is, to us, a grandeur in human eloquence. To hear or read the expression of thoughts, which (in our figurative way of describing them) are eminently clear, solid, lofty, and comprehensive, which are well combined, and conveyed to us by the most distinct and appropriate signs that language yields, is highly gratifying and elevating to the enlightened mind. And to minds which are at all *spiritually*, as well as intellectually, enlightened, there is no way in which true eloquence can appear more nobly exercised, than in prayer to God. False or affected eloquence indeed, is in no other use of it so deeply disgusting, because in this it is not only puerile but profane: the true eloquence of prayer is that simple greatness of thought and reverential fervour of desire in which lowliness and sublimity meet. With this a devout and well ordered mind is elevated and charmed; charmed perhaps too *much*: that is, as far as the charm results from an admiration of superior thought and expression. For we know, or should know, on reflection, that the loftiness and compass of human eloquence are as merely

relative as the mass and height of mountains ; and that in the view of the infinite Mind of Him who “ taketh up the isles as an atom,”* the differences between the most expansive and the narrowest, the most exalted and the humblest modes of human thought and speech, are as utterly inconsiderable. The disproportion between the conceptions and communications of Lord Bacon and those of a peasant, is to us immense ; but to the all-comprehending intellect it is only a difference in degrees of littleness : it is as the difference between Caucasus and a hillock unto Him “ who meted out heaven with a span.” To us the thoughts of some few among our fellow-men, and the medium through which they are conveyed to us, appear splendidly distinguished from those of the multitude : the difference is real ; and is, relatively, great : but it is a difference between “ very little things,” and therefore, *in itself*, a very little difference.

The full and finished strain of the parent nightingale enchants us ; the chirp of her brood has no power to please. Both however are but the feeble and limited notes of birds.—The eloquence of Cicero and Chatham transported their hearers ; while a child or an uninstructed person can scarcely

* Isaiah, xl. 15. Lowth's Translation.

give distinct utterance to one interesting thought or emotion. Yet both classes speak only, “with the tongues of men;” and thought conceived and expressed by means of so earthly and frail an organization as ours, is probably, even in its strongest conception and best enunciation, exceedingly weak and circumscribed, not only in the view of the Deity, but of some created minds. Even to Newton, the difference between the acquirements of a child who knew the first rudiments of numbers, and of a student who could demonstrate the theorems of Euclid, must have appeared, comparatively, trifling; because he himself is said to have comprehended the latter *intuitively*. We cannot, therefore, doubt that intelligences of a higher order must look on the highest reach of human science as infantine, and the ablest use of language as a very indirect and defective method of signifying thought. Even *we* feel its inadequacy. How much more must they! and if, therefore, the differences of human thought and speech, appear little, when *absolutely* considered, to superior *finite* minds, *how* little to Him that “fashioneth our hearts alike.”

These reflections may counteract the shock which imagination sometimes gives to faith, when we witness a peculiar limitation and feebleness of men-

tal powers; especially when this intellectual feebleness augments in correspondence to the decay of bodily health and life, so that all sensible indications oppose the idea of capacity for a separate spiritual being, and of the near approach to such a state.

Paley, when combating that scepticism as to a future life which grounds itself on the *general* contractedness of the human faculties, very pertinently asks, “whether any one who saw a child two hours after its birth, could suppose that it would ever come to understand *fluxions*.” But with regard also to what is sometimes termed *second* childhood, or to comparative childhood of the mind through life; the thought which has now been dwelt on, (that is, the small *absolute* distance between the lowest and highest points of our intellectual scale,) tends to correct false and painful impressions.

“This is the *bud* of being,” says Dr. Young. —If a very young florist were taken, at early spring, into a nursery of rose-plants, and saw but a few, of which the large buds began to shew their crimson, seeming ready, though but just unfolding, to burst into bloom on the next genial day, while many of equal age scarcely gave signs of vegetation, and many appeared checked and

drooping from partial frost, withering rather than growing, she might think with sorrow that all must die, except the few which were budding so auspiciously; but the cultivator, with smiles at this fear, might say,—My little friend, to you the difference is great between an opening and a quite unopened bud, or one that has been chilled by these easterly gales. But despair not of my charge. I shall soon transplant them to a better soil and aspect. In summer they all will bloom; and some of the humblest seedlings here, or of those which seem to you all but lifeless, may then bear the sweetest and noblest flowers.

This illustration, weak as it is, applies to the different degrees of development of the human faculties in our present condition.

But to return to the consideration of eloquence, (one chief exercise and expression of those faculties,) its great inadequacy may furnish us with one reason for that absence of the “excellency of speech,” which some have treated as an objection to the divine origin of scripture. Had Titian or Guido become a christian missionary, and been stationed among savages who were used to express facts or thoughts by rudely painted hieroglyphics, it is highly probable that he would sometimes have used the aid of his pencil in addressing them;

but it is improbable that he would have used any of their colours, or selected those which it was their taste or fashion to prefer, or adopted their rules for mingling and applying these; perceiving that neither their best materials, nor their rules of art, would be at all adequate to his subject. It would be much more likely, that, with some simple touches from a fragment of chalk, or sketches with a half-burnt brand, he should prove to them that his genius and his mission were from another world of painters.

But the thoughts first pursued are particularly applicable to the subject of prayer;—they forbid me to indulge contempt or distaste for the prayers of the most limited or untaught, provided they express, even in the lowliest channel of thought and utterance, an unfeigned piety. “The Lord looketh on the *heart*.” Incense may be presented in a cruse of the coarsest pottery, or in a classic vase of the most ornamented porcelain; it is of the same quality and value in each: the vessels, indeed, differ; yet each is but an earthen vessel; and though, in many respects, they are contrasted, both, in reality, abound in flaws, are soon defaced, and easily broken.

It does not at all follow, that attention to manner and language, in social prayer, is improper

or superfluous. And even in secret devotion, the connected clearness and unaffected energy of speech may be, as it respects many minds, a criterion of the real fixedness of thought and concentration of desire on spiritual things. So far as it is an effect and proof of these dispositions, such eloquence, if he be ever conscious of it in the closet, must and should afford satisfaction to the Christian. But yet, the reflections which have been now dwelt upon, should equally guard him against vain elation in that consciousness, and despondency at the want of it. At one time, perhaps, he is happily borne on in a strain of devotion which is fluent and forcible. Thoughts and words arise spontaneously, and connect themselves without effort. He “pours out his heart” with a copious and glowing freedom before his Father, who seeth in secret. And can the petty “pride and naughtiness of his heart” find fuel for self-idolatry even *there*?

The most usual, and strongest rebuke of such a feeling is, “What hast thou that thou hast not received?” As well might the dumb, to whom our Saviour restored the power of speech, have prided themselves on the eloquence of their thanksgivings.

But a further rebuke may be drawn from the present topic. What is the amount of *difference*,

in the ear of Him who heareth prayer, or even of his angels, between those thy best addresses, and the meanest or most embarrassed words of genuine worship which arise from the hut, the work-loft, or the field?

Perhaps, however, there may be more frequent occasion to apply this thought to the relief of discouragement. The worshipper's mind is confused; untuned by anxiety, haunted by some prevailing idea. Unrestrained by the presence of fellow-creatures, (which, being ascertained by the senses, could not be forgotten,) and but faintly realizing the presence of the Invisible Spirit, he utters incoherent petitions and praises, repeats the same thoughts and words, or uses such as are inappropriate: instead of distinctly soliciting particular blessings, deprecating special evils and dangers, acknowledging individual mercies,—his petitions are a sort of helpless summary of his wants; his confessions, a disorderly acknowledgment of sin and weakness; his thanks, a dim retrospect of half-remembered benefits. The review of *such* a kind of secret prayer, or the consciousness of its character while uttering it, mortifies and dejects the mind. Indeed, as far as it has arisen from a real decay of pious affections, or from distractions which it were a duty to shun, there is reason both to feel com-

punction, and to seek diligently the remedies of those spiritual ills; but, as far as it is independent of such causes, (and none will doubt that it may sometimes be so,) the pain with which it is contemplated should, by various considerations, be relieved. He “that inhabiteth eternity,” has not said, “to this man will I look,” and “with him will I dwell,” who worships me with enlarged and varied thoughts, with lofty and flowing, and well-arranged words;—but, with “him that is humble and of a contrite spirit, and that revereth MY word.”* The publican’s prayer, which our Saviour commends, is, though truly eloquent in its kind, such a brief and general supplication, as might be uttered and reiterated by the most enfeebled and discomposed spirit. And perhaps the eyes which that suppliant would “not so much as lift unto heaven,” and the hand which “smote upon his breast,” were signs of confession and entreaty, more expressive than his vocal signs, in the “presence of the angels of God.” “We know not,” says St. Paul, “what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with *unuttered* groanings.”† It is plain, there-

* Isaiah, lxvi. 2. *Lowth.*

† See Schleusner on the word ἀλάλητος.

fore, that the aid of the Spirit does not necessarily, or always, consist in imparting or enhancing the eloquence of *words*.

These are the weightiest considerations; but the thought, which it has here been attempted to illustrate, may be auxillary to them. For we may justly say,—This feeling of the poverty and brokenness of my prayers, as *compared* with my own at some other times, or with the eloquent devotions of others, is a highly exaggerated estimate of difference between degrees of weakness, arising from the very minuteness of my whole range. To an insect, it may be much, whether the sun-beam paint his wings, and cheer him into a flight of some hand-breadths from the soil, or whether an autumn drop have so stained and chilled them, that he can but flutter from blade to blade; but in the eye of the eagle, or even of the little songstress who aspires into the morning cloud, what is this difference, or how much is it “to be accounted of?”

Perhaps the sublimest strain of worship that ever a mere mortal uttered, has been, in the estimation of higher intelligences, no more superior to these broken prayers, (supposing there be an equal measure of true piety in each,) than the more graceful or significant gestures of one speechless petitioner would appear to me to excel those of

another. The mode of communicating ideas is so extremely defective, that its differences claim little or no regard. Let me ever bear in mind that emphatic and gracious admonition, "My son, give me thine *heart*." Our heavenly Father knows that his children have nothing else to give; and even this they give that it may be "formed anew." When its sacred renovation is complete, none can doubt that the intellectual power, the affluence of feeling, and the means of expression, will be perfected beyond all that hope can now anticipate, or imagination reach.

VI.

ON THE GREATNESS OF THE BLESSINGS WHICH WE SEEK IN PRAYER.

Who has ever rightly conceived, when addressing himself to the throne of the heavenly grace to implore benefits for his immortal spirit, the true greatness and worth of the favours that he is about to ask? Nothing but the revelations of a world “not seen as yet,” can give a due impression of their nature: and immortality itself cannot appreciate their amount, because it will be everlastingly to come: yet, doubtless, there might be attained a much stronger apprehension of the value of spiritual good than that in which I have commonly rested. It *will* be attained at that period, (so inevitably sure, although so vaguely and

dimly anticipated,) when I shall be, like “our fathers,” a prisoner on the last “bed of languishing,” where sensitive and earthly good must be viewed in its real insignificance and impotency; and I must feel with an entire irrefutable consciousness, “All this availeth me *nothing!*”

What an incalculable importance and excellency will the possessions and prospects of the soul *then* assume in its own estimation! What words or thoughts shall then suffice to compute the preciousness of “eternal redemption,” or of that “partaking of the divine nature,” which is the pledge of a divine and imperishable bliss!

We can imagine a subject of the great northern monarchy, sentenced, for some state offence, to banishment for life into Siberian deserts, prostrating himself before his prince with intense anxiety for pardon, overwhelmed with the bitter thought of perpetual separation from all that is dear, and the shame, and hardship, and desolation of that lingering, irreversible penalty. And should *my* heart be cold, when I fall before the true and universal Monarch, as an offender against the state and Majesty of heaven; when the favour which I have to entreat is that of a pardon from the righteous and uncontrollable Ruler of all worlds? What would be the intenseness of my solicitude to obtain this

act of grace, and the satisfying assurance of its reality, if I could contemplate the unmixed gloom, the hopeless rigour, and unutterable ignominy, of a spirit's banishment from the Father of mercies, and from the rejoicing millions that triumph in his love !

There is, indeed, this most happy difference, that, while success in entreating pardon from an earthly ruler, must be always, in a high degree, doubtful,—pardon from “ the King Eternal and Invisible,” if perseveringly pleaded for with a truly penitent heart, through the atoning mediation of his beloved Son, is declared to be infallibly sure ; —“ He is *faithful* and *just* to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” And this certainty, it may seem, must remove the deep and painful anxiety with which the suit would else be accompanied. So, indeed, in the mind of the true penitent, it *ought* to operate : his solicitude should not long be of a nature inconsistent with substantial *peace* ; yet it is to be remembered, that he has, in the present life, no external conveyance of this divine pardon, and no internal sign or ratification of it which will *prospectively* suffice ; the well-founded assurance of its being really granted, can only be proportioned to the continued sincerity and faith with which we seek

it, and to the unaffected contrition and unreserved allegiance of soul, of which we are lastingly conscious. That precious seal of personal redemption, which the Holy Spirit is ready to impress, day by day, continually, can find no place in “the tablets of the heart,” except that heart be daily softened and made receptive of the blessing by penitential prayer. Supplication for pardon cannot, by the enlightened and truly *humble* Christian, be felt or judged, at any period of his earthly course, to have become superfluous, or to be a mere formality. Although he has attained a peaceful hope of justification from that paternal Sovereign, before whom he long has bowed with unfeigned penitence and true conversion of soul, still, in order to *maintain* this state and sense of acceptance, he has ever to sue for the same inestimable gift of remission. What humble self-examining mind will doubt that this is fit and needful, both in the review of sins long past, and of recent offences? * “We must renew our requests for pardon every day,” says a most pious writer; “it is more necessary than to pray for our daily bread:” and again, “Who can understand his errors? Who can enumerate the

* James, iii. 2.—1 John, i. 8.

many defections from that strait rule of our duty? It would tire the hand of an angel to write down the pardons that God bestows upon one penitent believer.”*

Nor is it only pardon, but it is the gift of the *Holy Spirit*; it is the inheritance of the saints; it is *everlasting life*, which I am about to supplicate. And by what measure can I fix in my mind the magnitude of *these* requests? If we had seen, in former times, a Castilian noble about to enter the Escorial, that he might solicit an appointment to the vice-royalty of Peru, should we not have expected strong marks of ambitious desire and deep concern for the issue of his suit to appear upon his brow? And yet how strikingly would such a sight exhibit the penury and fallaciousness of this world, where, while the object sought included power, wealth, and magnificence almost regal, the candidate would yet, in fact, be asking, with all the devotion of his soul, for a burden of splendid cares. When a Christian appears before the King of kings, and asks to be prepared and qualified by divine influence, for a “crown of life,” it is certainly nothing resembling this earthly domination, or selfish glory, to which he aspires. His requests

* Dr. Bates.

are consistent with the deepest humility and self-renunciation, otherwise he “knows not what he asks.”* The sum of his requests, when he asks aright, is, that he may be enabled perfectly to love and glorify God, and “be satisfied with his likeness,” while all the praise shall redound to the infinite Giver. But he neither can, nor ought to hide from himself the vastness of these gifts, which he is encouraged and commanded to implore. He asks the Uncreated Energy to renovate and remould within him the very image of divine perfection; and to fit an heir of frailty and transgression for incorruptible and eternal joys.

It might be a weakness, excusable even in a thoughtful mind, to be somewhat dazzled by the full splendour of earthly empire; to forget, while soliciting a pardon, or a dignity, at the footstool of its loftiest possessor, that this imperial hand will soon be in the dust,—that I address only the dying tenant of a delegated power, whose successor may to-morrow reverse his pardons, revoke his donations, annul his investitures;—to forget, that even were the donor resolved to make his favours irrevocable by himself, and no less sure to survive him who obtains them, still this pardon could only

* Mark, x. 33.

affect the “life which is a vapour;” these honours only extend to the days which are “as a handbreadth.” To forget *these* truths for the moment might be a natural weakness. But how strange, when approaching “the King, the Lord of hosts,” the “only Ruler of princes,” to experience an illusion precisely *contrary* to this; to have been dazzled by what is false and fleeting, and to be dead to what is real and eternal; and how inexcusable to yield to this illusion with a sort of supineness; to forget, without a struggle, that I address Him who is “from everlasting to everlasting;” of whom “heaven is but the throne, and earth the footstool;” who hath “the keys of Hades and of death.”

When I enter on this employment of prayer, (which, except when attended with “pomp and circumstance,” many, that bear the Christian name, condemn, in their hearts, as an imbecile and superstitious observance,) I go to entreat what none but the Lord of the Universe can give, a pardon sealed with the blood of that true Victim, who was “slain from the foundation of the world;” a pardon that shall be in force when “the heavens have been folded up as a vesture,” and when unnumbered ages shall have witnessed to the “heirs of promise” the faithfulness of Jehovah, and “the immutabi-

lity of his counsel"—I go to entreat that principle of heavenly life, which, if it be kindled, and still cherished from the Sun of Righteousness, shall gloriously assimilate the soul to Him, in whom "is no darkness at all."

And shall the sneers or the coldness of an infidel and sensual age, persuade me that this is a weak or fanatical employ? Or shall the drowsiness of my own spirit degrade it into a lifeless task, an "exercise that profiteth little?"

But perhaps I plead in extenuation,—it is the *frequency* of the employ, which prevents my rightly feeling the importance of prayer, and the greatness of its object. Is it then thus with the children of this generation in their pursuit of wealth? They are found daily at the same desk; they return to the same details, and inquiries, and endeavours. They labour in the same routine of calculation; every accession to the grand balance excites new diligence, and makes the unremitting toil more light. The hoped-for aggregate is still in view; and all the irksome steps to its completion are forgotten. "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself." And do I, who desire the infinitely nobler attainment of being "rich towards God," "rich in faith," rich in the treasure of immortality, do I pretend the sameness, or common-

ness, or repetition of engagements which are the appointed means of this glorious acquisition, as an excuse for pursuing them carelessly?—Or have the suitors and aspirants after court favour, with an always-growing sense of the uncertainty of success, yet persevered in their heart-sickening round of efforts and repulses, “twice told the period spent on stubborn Troy,” or been induced, through successive years, as another of their number has mournfully recorded,

“To lose good days, that might be better spent;
To waste long nights in pensive discontent?”

And, shall a suitor to the court of heaven, believing the incomparable grandeur, and sure attainableness of the objects of Christian desire and hope, plead the long continuance and frequency of his suit as an excuse for not urging it still with a reverential, but untiring ardour? Surely, to those who receive the promises of the New Testament as divine, that truth needs no demonstration, even if it had not proceeded from the mouth of our Saviour himself, “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.” But it needed, as that Heavenly Teacher knew, to be strongly enforced on our unbelieving and indolent spirits; and still must the grounds on

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which it rests be often reviewed by memory and by conscience, else the seriousness and fervour of our prayer will bear no proportion to the magnitude of the hope set before us, or to the greatness and the mercy of Him who hath proposed it.

VII.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVINE INFLUENCE UPON THE THOUGHTS.

IT is obvious to an observer of his own mind, that a great proportion of his thoughts are unsought or involuntary. Objects of sensation, even the most minute or trivial, are perpetually exciting new ideas ; and so multiplied and diversified are the associations to which they give rise, that it is impossible to predict into what train of reflection any circumstance may lead us. And not only do outward objects or incidents excite different thoughts, in different minds, and in the same mind at different times, but the subsequent thoughts, suggested by preceding thoughts, and not by any thing externally perceived, are productive of others in a series which none can foresee. “ So completely,” says a

distinguished philosopher, “is the mind, in this particular, subjected to physical laws, that it has been justly observed, (by Lord Kaimes and others,) we cannot, by an effort of our will, call up any one thought; and that the train of our ideas depends on causes which operate in a manner inexplicable by us.” He adds, “Notwithstanding, however, the immediate dependence of the train of our thoughts on the laws of association, it must not be imagined that the will possesses no influence over it.—Of the powers which the mind possesses over the train of its thoughts, the most obvious is its power of singling out any one of them at pleasure, of detaining it, and of making it a particular object of attention. By doing so, we not only stop the succession that would otherwise take place, but, in consequence of our bringing into view the less obvious relations among our ideas, we frequently divert the current of our thoughts into a new channel.”*

Admitting the last statement, which, though it might be perplexed with fruitless objections or questions on the nature of the “will” and “power” supposed, is practically good and true, I would

* Stuart's *Philosophy of Mind*, Vol. I. Chap. V. Part I. Sect. 3. pp. 295, 297.

use those considerations which my own consciousness and the speculations of others agree to furnish on this very obscure subject, in order to deepen my conviction of the importance of *spiritual influence*. If it be impossible for me to predetermine, or fore-know, what thoughts will be suggested to my mind, even when I am engaged in a particular mental occupation, and still more obviously so when my attention is not directed to any special study, or when a variety of external communications are made through the senses, then I cannot calculate in how high a degree a special divine influence may or might regulate, quite imperceptibly, the succession of thought, and the consequent train of desires, purposes, and actions.

As far, indeed, as the first suggestion of thought depends upon perception from without, I have to ascribe it to the general or providential government of God; but the association of one thought with another, and of that with a third, and the excitement thus of a very numerous succession of thoughts, is one of the most secret and mysterious processes that we can conceive of. It is a sort of generative or *creative* process, inexpressibly rapid, and indefinitely variable.

To illustrate this by example :—I see a rainbow ; it may suggest to me the heavenly messenger of

the Grecian mythology, and lead me, either to the poetry of Homer, or the temples of Athens ; to the horrors of war, or the beauties of sculpture. Or, the brilliancy of the violet rays may bring to mind, either the flower of that name, or the rich plumage of American birds ; and it may depend on which of these associations presents itself, whether I shall retrace a rural walk with a departed friend, or reflect on the conquest of Mexico, and the wealth or barbaric splendour of its monarchs. Or, the rainbow may be viewed as the token of God's covenant, no more to destroy the earth by a deluge ; and I may thence be led to reflections on the doom of the antediluvians ; to speculations on geology ; or to thoughts on that predicted destruction, by an opposite element, which awaits the globe. Or, the first sight of the rainbow may suggest the Newtonian theory of optics ; and this may conduct me, either to the telescope or to the microscope, thence to the history of insects, or the lunar influence on the tides ; or, first, to the character of Newton, and then to the capacities of the human intellect. These are but a few of the obvious diversities of thought, which a familiar object may immediately bring into the mind. I know by experience, in this particular instance, that the first association has been often utterly dissimilar to any of these. And,

if the *first* admits of such variety, how incalculable the subsequent multiplication of that variety ! How immense is each one of those fields into which either of the second or third steps of association that have been mentioned would introduce the mind, and how impossible to foresee on what tract, or what point, in either, it would fix, and where it would begin to take a different or contrary course. How much contemplation, that is animating to human hope ; how much that should excite admiration of divine wisdom ; how much that is connected with scientific inventions and designs, or with that awful consummation of all things which the Bible predicts ; how many injurious and presumptuous doubts, or how many fruitless musings, or how many impure and seductive imaginations, or frivolous recollections, might arise in half an hour, in different minds, or even in one and the same mind, all originating in this single source !

Undoubtedly much will depend on the previous inclinations and habits of the understanding and the fancy. The theologian, the painter, the agriculturist, the mathematician, the lover of money, the voluptuary, will probably have each his peculiar associations at first presented by the same object, and will all likewise be attracted respec-

tively by such of the succeeding train as most accord with their desires or pursuits. This shews the deep importance both of our practical habits, and our habits of thought ; and the duty of cultivating those which are good and profitable.

But still, there is, as certainly, in the same mind, a vast diversity in the range of thought, according to the occurrences, the cares, the tempers, or passions, of different periods. The professed study or occupation of an individual, is very far, except in some cases of most intense devotion to a sole object, from determining the occasional, or even ordinary current of reflection ; and one of the unnumbered ideas that have this hour flitted through a mind scarcely conscious of their passage, may at another hour be held fast, and become the source of lengthened meditation and serious action.

Nor does the view which has now been taken of this subject at all suffice to express the exceedingly minute, recondite, and often most improbable associations, by which the train of thought is incessantly liable to be changed or interrupted.

But all these considerations tend to shew what illimitable opportunity exists for the operation of spiritual influence on the soul. That Power, in whom I exist, can not only present external ob-

jects to impress thought, but can determine which, amidst all possible impressions, shall take place ; or at any stage, in the career of thought, can suddenly and secretly alter its direction. One association may be selected from amidst a thousand which were as likely to occur, and which might all appear alike indifferent or unimportant ; or, in the lapse of countless indistinct momentary conceptions, the most shadowy and fugitive of the whole may be arrested, and made to assume clearness and force.

It is not easy to understand what the philosopher, who has been cited, meant, when he wrote of “ the *laws* of association,” and of “ *physical laws*,” as directing the train of our thoughts ; it is probable he meant little more than to give a name to operations which he acknowledged “ inexplicable.” He could scarcely suppose *general* and *invariable* rules by which thoughts proceed from sensations, and from each other ; for what could be less credible than this supposition to one who had so closely observed the endless varieties and anomalies in the suggestion and succession of his own ? But even could that supposition be maintained, his admission that the mind itself has a power to “ stop,” or “ divert the current ” of thought, evidently overthrows it ; and if the mind itself

have this power, how much more the Supreme and Almighty Mind, which formed and governs all its faculties !

The more carefully and analytically we reflect on this subject, the more shall we be convinced, that influences of the Divine Spirit may be exercised within us, in the highest degree beneficial and efficacious, and yet entirely indistinguishable from the operations of our own mental powers. That I should have this idea rather than another, these passing remembrances or images instead of those, that flow of thought rather than a different one, is a thing so far from appearing extraordinary or supernatural, that it accords with perpetual experience, and excites no attention ; and yet it may arise from the express and special agency of the Spirit of God, and may ultimately have the most important effects on my course through life, on my usefulness, on the well-being of others, on my eternal happiness, and theirs.

It is very material to consider, that this agency may, as I have said, be altogether undiscerned, and undiscernible by me ; and yet my best purposes, my purest actions, my escape or recovery from temptations, be exclusively and directly its result.

It is reasonable to suppose that the actings of

spirit on spirit will be incomparably more refined, more exquisitely untraceable, than those which take place on corporeal substances; and yet how incomprehensibly minute and refined are the vital functions and changes in the smallest visible creatures. He who can maintain and renew all the complexities of the vital system, and the system of instincts, in successive generations of animalcules, can surely bring into the mind a thought seemingly inconsiderable in itself, which yet may be the sole original instrument of the temporal destinies of a kingdom, or the everlasting destinies of a soul.

On the whole, these reflections not only expose the shallow presumption, the unintelligent profaneness, of those who deride the doctrine of spiritual influence, but they should also greatly heighten my persuasion of the paramount importance of prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit; of the unknown benefits which such prayer may have already procured me, by influences secretly leading to good, and diverting from evil; and of the still happier and more decisive results which may be expected from continuing, more importunately, to entreat this unseen control and direction. Let me never begin the day without earnestly imploring, that the great Searcher of hearts

would “ cleanse the thoughts of my heart by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit ;” that he would turn the current of my soul, “ as the rivers of water, whithersoever he will !”

VIII.

ON EXEMPTION FROM SEVERE BODILY DISEASE AND HARM, AND ITS IMPROVEMENT.

IT is only by a participation comparatively slight, and this, through the preventing goodness of the great Preserver, very unfrequent, that I have been experimentally taught the severity of those bodily sufferings to which we all are liable. In any part of this frame, so “curiously wrought,” so variously assailable, subject to derangements so numerous—acute pain might, in this hour, be permitted to arise, which would absorb and oppress the mind, incapacitate it alike for fulfilling the active offices or enjoying the comforts allotted to me, and induce distressful forebodings of a pro-

longed anguish which no human skill might remove. Or a partial, and, in some respects, trifling harm, might confine me to one spot ; forbidding all variety of scene or of exertion. The invaluable organs of sight, of hearing, or of speech, might be quickly destroyed or impaired, and the principal employments of my life, with many of the mutual blessings of society, must then be at once resigned. Or some disease might assault me which should involve the afflictive hazard of contagion to others, or be attended with peculiar and extreme mortification to myself.

But are not these, and other bodily ills, incident to our earthly condition, so well known, so often suggested by observing the calamities of those around us,—or have not they been so much dwelt upon in every form of moral and pious admonition,—that it is quite superfluous to recal and enumerate them ?

Obvious, and almost inevitable, as may be the kind of reflection which they prompt, it has not yet been deep and efficacious, (and therefore claims to be presented yet again,) unless it produce a constant, heartfelt, and practical gratitude to God.

Have I to confess that His lenity and kindness are sometimes unacknowledged and unthought of,

who has exempted me, notwithstanding multiplied provocations of his justice, from this class of grievous trials? Or, while daily presenting supplications for *new* mercies, can I frequently be content to revert to these, which have been so long continued, or to recognize their actual continuance at this moment, with a mere heartless ceremonial acknowledgment? Then are there, indeed, humbling reasons for me to review more feelingly their variety and their value.

But besides this strong claim on me for cordial thanksgiving, (the neglect or cold fulfilment of which might itself have justly incurred repeated forfeitures of the blessings that demand it,) the exemption from severe bodily calamity should also powerfully engage me to diligence in every duty; to a watchful concern for all spiritual improvement; to perseverance in prayer for all spiritual benefits. While such exemption is granted, I am not only more capable of bodily, but of mental activity; and especially am more competent to regular and enlarged exercises of worship, than I can hope to be in seasons of great debility, or restlessness, or pain.

How weak and ungrateful, therefore, is it to repine under trivial indisposition, or yield to passing languor; rather let me remember the sufferers

who are “weary with their groaning;” who are “full of tossings to and fro until the dawning of the day;” who obtain few and short intermissions of the most distressing and torturing sensations. On these, the mercy of Him, who “despiseth not his prisoners,” will compassionately wait, and their “*sighing*” shall “come before him;” but from *me*, while indulged with this ability and opportunity to wait upon my God, there should arise the more ample and unwearied petitions for every sacred gift, that can renew, and strengthen, and purify, and enrich the soul.

It cannot, or ought not to be unperceived by me, that, although I am thus favoured with bodily ease and health, the moral disorders of the spirit are many and variable; some more habitual and insidious, others more occasional and violent. The selfish and angry passions sometimes inflict a wound, which nothing but new supplies of the grace of humility can heal; feverish desires, and aching discontents, and wasting anxieties, invade the breast, which the lenitive of resignation and the cordial of heavenly hope alone can soothe. That faintness or palsy of the will, which is evinced by a backwardness to self-denying duties, by shrinking from exertions which conscience claims, and by general “weariness in well doing,” may be found

in humiliating connexion with a physical health and strength, that have been denied to some of the most laborious servants of God, and most indefatigable friends of mankind ;—and whence, but from a divine energy, quickening and upholding my best resolves, shall these spiritual maladies receive an effectual cure? Conscious, as I must be, of some, if not of all those internal evils, how can I hope, even partially, to subdue and expel them, unless, by a vigilant use of *present* advantages and facilities, I embrace the favouring occasion which a gracious Providence bestows? Is it not *now* the time for progress in his service, for alacrity and steadfastness in every good work, for zealously and importunately seeking, from the Author of Good, that complete renovation and health of the soul, which should be the first object of my solicitude? If life itself be given and prolonged for this great end, then that measure of bodily health and ease, on which the full *use* of life depends, should assuredly be considered, and appreciated, and employed, with a reference to the same exalted purpose.

My present condition, in which a prevalence of these blessings is combined with such allotments of past and present trial, as have deeply imprinted on

the heart the ills that life includes, (a condition graciously assigned to many,) is peculiarly adapted to admit and promote the earnest and successful prosecution of our highest good. Have our chastisements been numerous and severe enough most intimately to convince us, that we must look to Heaven for what is substantial and unfailing? Has the “Father of our spirits” imposed corrections which have sufficed, as instruments of his divine power, to awaken and revive a sense of our dependence, of our demerits, of our spiritual exigencies?—And yet, are these so graciously *moderated*, especially with regard to bodily suffering, that they still leave the capacity for pursuing active duties, and seeking spiritual supplies, in a great degree complete?

Can there be a more cogent reason for grateful and instant assiduity, both in action and devotion?

Even that exalted Person who was alone entitled to say, “None taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself;” said also, (and the solemn declaration has more force than an injunction,) “*I* must work the works of Him that sent me, while it is *day*;—the night cometh, when *none* can work.”—To us, not only a day of life, but a day of

health, of strength, of ease, is a pure gratuity, which only Almighty power and goodness can confer; and though this gratuity has been reiterated and multiplied so long,—who can insure it for to-morrow?

IX.

ON INTERCESSORY PRAYER FOR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS.

BOUNDLESS and invaluable means of beneficence, both social and secret, are ever open to those who believe in the efficacy of prayer *for others* : which no one that truly receives the Scriptures, can deliberately question. Has it been enough observed, how vast is the worth of the Christian revelation in this particular view : and how considerable an argument of its *divinity*, as far as that is corroborated by every new aspect or development of its worth, may be hence deduced ? Without discussing the creeds of heathens, ancient or modern, it is plain, that in countries where Christianity prevails, those who do not seriously receive it, have generally no settled belief (if indeed any belief at

all) in the direct benefits of prayer, whether personal or intercessory. Yet in some of these persons, the sympathies of nature are so far from being extinct, that they appear in the tenderest forms of emotion, and the most engaging acts of humanity. I shall never forget the suppressed tears of a late amiable metaphysician and poet, when bidding farewell to the youthful assembly whom his eloquence had charmed, who were then to disperse themselves from that scene of academic enjoyment, into the varied and eventful paths of busy life. This indeed might be only a vague and transient sentiment of melancholy, on the occasion which always tends to excite it,—the *last time*. But how would the same refined and susceptible spirit have felt, had he, like Sir William Jones in India, prevailed with a beloved wife, languishing under dangerous indisposition, to quit him for Europe ; or like multitudes beside, been as remotely separated, by his or their pursuits, from the individuals most dear to him ? If, as was feared by some who enjoyed the intellectual luxury of his private intercourse, this fine mind had not at that period decisively embraced the Christian revelation, it is highly probable, that, notwithstanding his eloquent defences of the doctrine of Divine Providence, and the soul's immortality, he possessed no

fixed confidence in the direct efficacy of *prayer*.^{*} And then how *powerless*, in his own estimation, would have been his deepest solicitude for the absent; how bitterly *unavailing* the tenderest wishes and regrets to which events might give birth! — Even were there not other and far weightier reasons for our desire, that both “the wise and the unwise” might believe the gospel, this one would seem sufficient;—the comfort derived from that benevolence which is exercised in prayer, towards those whom we may have little or no power otherwise to aid, or influence, or requite. There is no need that a continent or a sea be interposed, in order to deprive us of this power. For a child in a distant city, for a relative in another province, for a friend in sickness or calamity, for one who has our best wishes, but whom painful circumstances forbid us to meet, how little can sometimes be done, or even attempted, unless faith resort to that exercise of kindness, too often despised or distrusted by man, but chosen and prescribed by God, which entreats for them infinitely more than man can give. By the art of writing, and the facility of conveying what is written (both which are subjects of gratitude), I may, indeed, address

* See Note A, at the end of the volume.

to each some words of affectionate counsel or sympathy ; but, besides that these communications cannot be very copious or frequent, and sometimes are wholly precluded, how small is their real value, justly and highly as we may often prize them, when compared with that of heartfelt addresses on our behalf to Him from whom “ every good gift and every perfect boon”* descends ! The affectionate wishes of a Christian friend, should for this be most valued, that they may be accounted an intimation, and almost an implied pledge, of his affectionate prayers, which are far better.—It has been the pleasing compact of some, closely joined in heart, but widely distant in place, to look at the same hour on the same luminary, to watch the beam of the same rising moon, or evening star, and thus to imagine a kind of sensible union, by being alike and at once present to the same beautiful object. How does it heighten and substantiate this device of friendship, (which else is comparatively a fruitless and empty refinement,) to commune not merely with a bright emblem of the divine bounty, but with the omnipresent Benefactor himself ; to pour out mutual intercession before the “ Father of” these heavenly “ lights,” “ with

* See Note B, at the end of the volume.

whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." My dearest friend may be in another hemisphere; or, though but a few leagues divide us, a cloud may conceal that star from one which rises in brightness to the other; but if we devoutly intercede for each other's welfare, before Him by whose presence all time and space are comprised,—our supplications, whether offered at one or at different hours, form a real and intimate communion with each other and with Him; a communion fraught, we trust, not only with soothing sentiments, but with real blessings. The showers of Britain and of Sumatra, fall or flow into the same mighty deep;—the tears of Christian sympathy "poured out to God," though shed in the remotest climates, may be said to drop into the same ocean of His loving-kindness, and to be mingled there.

But, besides this, our kindest thoughts and wishes for our friends cannot be *freely* expressed to them, unless regard be strictly reciprocal, and sentiment on the most important points be similar. The most faithful and thankworthy offices of kindred and friendship, are well known to be the most difficult. If I perceive or learn that any for whom I am interested, have imbibed false principles, or joined seducing associates; if I judge that their situation may invite to a course which will

endanger peace and prosperity ; or that they are hitherto thoughtless of revealed truths and of eternal prospects, or perpetually diverted from them ;—yet how hard is it, in any mode of intercourse, to convey beneficially such kind admonitions or expostulations as my regard would prompt ! How generally distasteful, sometimes how strongly repulsive, to persons of every age and class, is this sort of friendly interference ! How do pride, and the passions, in their various forms, revolt from it, and view him that attempts it as officious or severe, censorious or timid, narrow, melancholic, or illiberal ! Not that the risk of these imputations or impressions should prevent us from attempting the duty, though it should make us circumspect as to the fit manner and the fit opportunity. The duty involves self-denial ; it approaches to what Saurin has emphatically termed “ moral martyrdom ;” and, therefore, if only as a test of sincerity and exercise of Christian fortitude, it should not be wholly declined ; but yet, must not the experience of its great difficulty, and the belief of its small success, nay, its apparent *ill* effect at times, lead me to prize ten-fold the free indefeasible privilege of secret intercession for those on whose behalf I feel so deep concern ; a duty far less difficult, and probably, in many cases, incomparably more bene-

ficial? My child, eager in the chase of some new pleasure, my parent fixed in some growing habit, my friend intrenched in his favourite opinions, my kinsman earnest in some absorbing pursuit, may, each, really if not avowedly, find my most guarded and affectionate suggestions unwelcome. But methinks it cannot to either be unwelcome, nay, must move the heart of each, if he believe that the voice of secret prayer entreats for him the checks and the incitements of an omnipresent Friend, the all-powerful monitions and blessed illuminations of a heavenly Guide, the “repentance and remission of sins,” the grace, and wisdom, and renovation from above, which insure unchangeable joy.

And who can say what are not, or shall not be the happy effects, immediate or remote, of our prayers “one for another?” Can I remember critical points in my own history, or have such been disclosed to me in the history of others, when either bodily danger has been imminent, or different and greater perils have impended; when the mind, the character, has been on the brink of a gulf, drawn on by a pernicious allurements, entangled in a hidden snare, oppressed with trials hardly to be borne, urged towards the edge of a frightful desperation?—And who can tell that the prayer of a departed parent, long since uttered and recorded,

or the tender intercession of a friend far away, was not as the chosen invisible thread, which, in the hand of a gracious Providence, held me back from ruin? Who knows that it was not declared by Him to whom all power in heaven and in earth is given, or by some rejoicing minister of his compassion?—The prayers of my servant, to whom thou wast and art so dear, have come up as a memorial on thy behalf. Those secret supplications are the instrument by which the fulfilment of my merciful purpose is procured. In remembrance of *them*, I rescue thee from this destruction.—And, although every source of hope is liable to perversion, this can hardly encourage, in the minds of the irreligious, a delusive reliance on the prayers of others, as superseding their own. Guilt and danger would be consciously aggravated by such a presumptuous trust, which implies a measure of belief in the momentous truths that are personally slighted. None can rationally expect, at least as to his *highest* interest, eventual benefit from the intercession of another, till he is effectually prompted to prayers and endeavours for *himself*. But none, *when* so prompted, can be injured by the grateful and affecting thought, that his truest earthly friends may have instrumentally procured for him the awakening influence of that Supreme Friend, to

whom he owes supreme gratitude. Nor let it seem more difficult to believe the initial efficacy of intercessory, than of personal prayer, even towards the procurement of everlasting benefits. All prayer is but an instituted means, connected by the Almighty with his own gracious purpose, and when viewed in this true light, (apart from any idea of power or merit in the suppliant or the recipient,) the one kind of prayer may be as readily and safely conceived to be efficacious as the other. It would, indeed, be unscriptural for the offerer (as well as for the object) of intercession, to believe that it can procure the spiritual and eternal good of another, unless it first instrumentally procure for him that change of mind, by which he shall be personally disposed to seek and obtain the pre-requisites of happiness; but nothing forbids the hope that it may initially conduce to these blessed results; on the contrary, the facts and promises of scripture intimate that it often does so. Intercession for near friends is, in pious minds, a strong dictate of feeling; and ample assurances sanction our belief that these, like all their prayers, shall be, some way or other, not *in vain*. How delightful is it to hope, when we see the objects of fond solicitude in any degree answer our dearest wishes, that prayer *has not* been in vain!

Should this, however, be far from apparent : should I have to reflect, as many have with equal grief,—Thus far my earnest and long-offered prayers seem fruitless ;—yet how do I know, that although they have not yet procured the desired good, they have not averted far higher degrees of evil ? How do I know but that they will be fully answered at length, and the final effusions of gratitude both to the Author of good, and to me its feeble instrument, be ample in proportion to the greatness of His long suffering, and the perseverance of my poor affection, itself derived from Him ?—No doubt, in a future state, our gratitude towards the instruments of good, will be more constantly and entirely subordinate, as a feeling, than it can be here : because the sensible presence of Him that hath “ so loved ” us, must give an inconceivably higher tone to the respondent emotion of love towards *Him* ; but this affords no sort of ground for supposing that our grateful and affectionate feelings towards the humblest instruments of good will be lessened. On the contrary, it is obvious that they may be delightfully augmented, and yet be more subordinate relatively to Him who is worthy of *infinite* praises, and who, probably, has destined all the happy to an immeasurable *progression* in love. What then will it be for the per-

fectured spirit to embrace with grateful delight those whom divine goodness prompted to seek its felicity, as well as to bow in rapture before that Saviour who purposed, and prepared, and dispenses all felicity, yea, who is himself “all and in all?” With what feelings then shall the child bless his parent, the husband his wife, the friend his friend, before the throne of God, repeating with ardent acknowledgment,—this was the unwearied and tender suppliant for my happiness,—this the beloved hand which thy grace taught to sue, and to receive for me, the gift of repentance !

And what will be the correspondent joy of those whose weak petitions shall be so remembered and rewarded !—How can I neglect such a duty as this, a duty which ought to be so pleasing and consolatory now, and which will yield, there is every reason to conclude, so affecting and delightful a recompense hereafter? How can I neglect, while observing in some measure the letter and semblance of the duty, to fulfil it also in “*spirit and in truth* ?”

X.

ON THE MEANS BY WHICH OUR THOUGHTS OF THE MORAL PERFECTIONS OF DEITY MAY BE ELEVATED.

IT should be my study to obtain a stronger and more vivid impression of the *moral* attributes of God, than of those which are intellectual or physical only, or so conceived of by us. For the former more intimately affect the well-being, and should therefore more deeply excite the joy and adoration of his creatures.

But the contemplation of the greatness and wisdom of the Deity is one kind of *measure* by which to estimate his moral attributes, though (I suspect) not enough resorted to for this purpose. It is a truth inseparable from the idea of God, that, in Him are *all* perfections, and in infinite degrees.*

* This is perhaps no where more succinctly demonstrated than in Grotius de Verit. Rel. Christ. Lib. i. s. 4, 5.

But we know not how to conceive of perfection, and least of all, of an infinite *moral* perfection.* The moral excellence which we have experienced or witnessed in fallen human nature, even in its most ennobled and purified state on earth, is so imperfect and so limited, that it affords no just analogy by which to rise to the notion of the moral excellence of Deity. But the Creator, having placed before our eyes the *sensible* proofs of his boundless power, of his immense wisdom, of his exquisite skill, we should attempt to measure by this vast scale, the immensity of his benevolence; the universality and exactness of his equity; the sublimity and refinement of his holiness; the boundlessness of his love.

No doubt, there is a contradiction in the very thought of measuring what is infinite; but, since we are of necessity unable adequately to conceive of the infinite, we should aim at some approximation; and it will certainly extend our narrow conceptions *towards* infinitude, to avail ourselves of the grandest measures which the senses (and that scientific use of them which philosophy has made) can afford, either in the way of figurative comparison, or, more strictly, in the way of analogy.

When I look on the noon-day sun, and con-

* See Note C, at the end of the volume.

sider “the immensity of the sphere which is filled with particles”* of light issuing from it, let me remember this is an emblem, yet only a very partial emblem, of the munificence of the Creator; for He has fixed in space a mighty host of suns, from each of which light has been directed to my eye. Or, let me thus reason in the way of analogy.—The Creator directs, perpetually, from unnumbered luminaries, throughout immeasurable spaces, particles of light, the minuteness, and velocity, and multitude of which, it is impossible for the human imagination to conceive. Here, then, is exhibited a *part* of his wisdom and power; but the attributes of God are all alike inexhaustible or infinite; some part, therefore, of his *goodness*, or *rectitude*, must be equal to so much of wisdom and power, as is here displayed.

Dr. Paley has brilliantly set forth the view which the creation gives of the physical attributes of Deity, when he says, “At one end (of the scale) we see an intelligent Power arranging planetary systems; fixing, for instance, the trajectory of Saturn, or constructing a ring of two hundred thousand miles diameter, to surround his body, and be suspended, like a magnificent arch, over the

* Paley’s Natural Theology, p. 376.

heads of his inhabitants ; and at the other, bending a hooked tooth, concerting and providing appropriate mechanism for the clasping and re-clasping of the filaments of the feather of a humming-bird.”* Let me apply this scale to the moral attributes. Reason tells me that they are equal to the physical ; *i. e.* perfect and infinite. Revelation enumerates them. “ A God of truth, and without iniquity ; just and right is He.” “ Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right ?” “ He is glorious in holiness.” “ The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.” “ His compassions fail not.” “ God is love.”

Do I wish, then, to augment my impression of the stability of this truth or faithfulness ; of the correctness and infallibility of this justice ; of the plenitude of this mercy ; the vastness of this love ? May not an augmented impression be attained by considering a part of the greatness of a natural attribute, (which is visibly or demonstrably observed,) as equal to, and representative of, some part of the greatness of a moral attribute ?——For example :—*As* is that stability of divine *power* which continually sustains the planet Saturn, a

* Natural Theology, page 540.

mass one thousand times greater than our world,* and guides, together with its immense ring, and seven moons, in the same orbit round the sun, from age to age, at the distance of nine hundred millions of miles from that luminary, and with an hourly velocity of twenty-two thousand miles,—so is a degree or part of the stability of divine *truth*.

As are that diversity and exquisiteness of divine skill, which form and discriminate in all climates, and in all ages, the rudiments of an emmet, and of the grain which it collects, causing each to reproduce its kind, or which create the particles of light of such an inconceivable smallness, that, although darted from the sun at the rate of two hundred thousand miles in a second, they strike, without wounding them, the petals of the most delicate flower, or the retina of an insect's eye,†—so are some degrees of the extent and exactitude of God's *retributive justice*.

As is that stupendous energy of *attraction*, by

* The calculations of magnitudes, distances, &c., as given in the more and less recent popular works, considerably vary. These are adopted from Bonnycastle's Introduction. Edit. vi. (1811,) pp. 34 and 270.

† See Natural Theology, page 376; and Ferguson's Astronomy, page 87.

which the Almighty Ruler governs all the planets of our system, rushing through their vast revolutions, “enormous globes, held by nothing, confined by nothing, turned into free and boundless space,”* and as is that mighty, yet gentle *education* of vegetative life, by which He calls forth the foliage on ten thousand forests, and renews the plants, and fruits, and flowers, of every zone and region,—so is a *portion* of the unsearchable strength and exceeding tenderness of divine *love*. “Lo, these are *parts* of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him!” For what are the herbs, or flowers, or insects of a single planet, (though the organization, and vitality, and reproduction of either of these classes, unspeakably transcends our thoughts of possible skill,) when compared with the probable and inconceivable multiplicity of such wonders in the universe? Or what is the magnitude, swiftness, or unerring revolution of one world, or one system of worlds, (though each of these baffles all our conceptions of grandeur,) when compared with the vastness and multitude of those fixed stars or suns, some of which have been computed to be at least four hundred thousand times more distant than the sun

* Paley.

which enlightens our earth ?* When, therefore, I thus attempt to estimate in part, any moral perfection of Deity, (although my apprehension of it will certainly be raised far higher, than by more vague and cursory views and expressions,) I am well aware that the highest measures which our faculties can, with any sort of distinctness, realize or apply, are but indefinitely small parts of those which would be attained by a wider survey, and more intimate knowledge of the works of God.

But divine revelation affords me a different, and a *direct*, measure of the moral attributes of Deity : a measure which is *adequate* also, (if we could but adequately conceive of it,) because it is *infinite* : that is, the union of the Divine nature with the human, in the person of our Saviour. It will be acknowledged, by all who receive this amazing fact, that the primary design of it is the manifestation of those perfect attributes : that design being inclusive of human salvation, and probably of many other glorious effects which eternity will disclose. Thus the grand design of what is made known to man, whether in the works or in the word of God,

* Ferguson's Astronomy, pp. 2 and 109. But it should be rather said, that the distance utterly exceeds our means of calculation ; since it appears that the parallax of the fixed stars is wholly insensible.

is to exhibit to him his Creator's perfections. And in *both* ways of communication, the Deity, if I may use such an expression without irreverence, addresses his feeble creature in vast and sublime *hieroglyphics*. It is not by fleeting voices, or by mere written declarations, that he announces his perfections. When he would impress on us his omnipotent wisdom, he sets before us the earth and the heavens, the wonders of innumerable worlds. When he would make known the infinity of his holiness, justice, and love, he records, that the "Word who was with God, and was God," "without whom was not any thing made that was made," assumed our nature into personal union with the divine, and, in that assumed nature, became a sacrifice for sin. It is true, this is (necessarily) recorded in *words*; for the stupendous fact, which is the subject of the record, could not stand permanently before the eyes of man, in the present world, as the facts of creation do, unless the Son of God, in his glorified state, had remained on earth, or his abode had become accessible or visible to us in our present condition, which would have been quite inconsistent with a state of probation, or "life by faith." But it is the *fact* of the incarnation, not the record, which is the expression or measure of the moral perfections of the Godhead. Words are

not adequate signs or symbols of the divine attributes: divine *acts* can alone enunciate these.

In other worlds, (possibly, at some period, to all moral beings,) the fact of the incarnation of the "Word" is or will be sensibly displayed, by the view of that nature wherein he suffered, in its exaltation to the throne of God: and thus the moral attributes of Him, that "spared not his own Son," are even more illustriously exhibited, than are his intelligence and power by the spectacle of the material universe. "He that liveth and was dead," for ever occupies the "holy of holies," within the illimitable temple of creation, and proclaims to all creatures, "by the form he bears," that in Deity there is infinite holiness and infinite love.

That kind of measure of these attributes, which was first named, is confessedly indirect and insufficient; it is an attempt at comparison with *other* attributes, as exhibited in works which are in some sense, notwithstanding their magnificence, *finite*; but the "great mystery of godliness" displays these moral perfections by a deed of condescension, which we can no otherwise conceive of than as *infinite*. If the incarnation of Deity be more astonishing (which the incredulity of many seems to prove) than the creation of the universe, by so

much the more forcibly and eloquently does it express his *moral* attributes, than the creation “uttereth” his *intellectual* perfection. And this may be used as a considerable argument for the truth of the fact, and of that interpretation of the record which upholds it. For if those attributes of God which are *moral*, be more excellent than all others, (and this, I suppose, cannot be denied,) it is reasonable to infer, that the manifestation of the most excellent would be the most astonishing and glorious; that the wonders by which perfect purity, justice, and compassion are evinced, would be such as to exceed those by which wisdom and power are displayed. It was worth the creation of the material worlds to exhibit to all spiritual natures the depths of the divine intellect; but it was worth the incarnation of Him by whom “all things were,” to exhibit to all spiritual natures the heights of the divine rectitude and mercy.

Is then the first kind of measure, by which I attempted to raise my thoughts of the moral perfections of God, superseded or become useless, in the contemplation of that unparalleled fact, by which the Christian revelation teaches me to estimate them? Quite otherwise; because while I deduce the greatness of these moral perfections from the appearances of nature, I obtain, in the

agreement of this deduction with the declarations of scripture, and with the inference derivable from the most wonderful fact which it reveals, a corroboration of the divine truth both of the declarations and the fact. And besides, if it *were* best to resort exclusively to the incarnation, as the direct and most sublime proof of the moral attributes of the Godhead, it would, not the less, be advantageous, frequently first to meditate on the “eternal power” and wisdom of the “Godhead,” as “understood by the things that are made.” For when I would contemplate the Son of God, “whom he hath appointed heir of all things,” “by whom also he made the worlds,” and who “upholds all things (or, “the universe,”*) by the word of his power,” as having, “by himself, made purification of our sins,” it will surely enhance my sense of the wonderful condescension of this act, and of the moral perfections which prompted it, first to reflect distinctly on some portion of those “worlds,” some phenomena of that “universe.” When I have intently considered a single planet, or a single satellite, moving through the heaven; or have thought of that vast mass of waters which covers but a part of our own globe; or have attentively

* τὰ πάντα. Compare Heb. i. 3. and Col. i. 16, 17, with Eph. iii. 9. 2 Peter iii. 4, and especially Rev. iv. 11.

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observed the shielded “gauze wings of the beetle,”* or the “jointed proboscis” of the bee,† I have a much more exalted idea of Him who “made the worlds,” and who “upholdeth all things,” than as if I had merely read these or other *declarations* of his power; and in proportion to my real apprehension of his greatness, will be my appreciation of whatever divine attributes are exhibited by his voluntary abasement.

* Paley's Natural Theology, page 321. † Ibid. page 325—6.

XI.

ON SEEKING TO EXCITE IN OURSELVES A SPIRIT OF JOYFUL PRAISE.

OUR worship seems but a strange preparative for heaven, unless praise and thanksgiving form a material part of it; and, indeed, unless our praise be accompanied by joyful feelings.

Yet he, who by constant and earnest practice, acquires an increasing skill in music, although his present situation and temper lead him chiefly, and most cordially, to exercise himself in that of the plaintive and mournful kind, will be prepared, when in different circumstances, to execute melodies, or join in harmonies of an animated and exulting strain; and so, we trust, he that earnestly cultivates a more and more intimate converse with God, although it may now consist, in a great

measure, of sorrowful confession and unsatisfied desire, will yet be fitted, by these very exercises, for an opposite employment of the same devotional habit, the same heavenly science, in that region where adoration and gratitude shall be the unavoidable overflowing from a fulness of delight. The musician, however, if he have reason to expect that he is to take part, ere long, in some great festival, where every chorus, and every note, will be in the strain of gladness and triumph, ought frequently now to attempt these exercises of his art, both in solitude and in society; for though his pensive mood may not accord with them, this is but fit respect to the patron who gave him his instrument, and who designed it ultimately for that most honourable and delightful use. He should remember also, that these preludes may, in some measure, dispel the feelings with which they disagree, and awaken those which they express. The application is obvious; but still the difficulty of him, who, when oppressed with sadness, would make “melody in his heart,” is far greater. The musician can produce the same *notes* as if his soul was in every vibration of the strings, though the grace and vigour of expression and execution may be less; but it is hard when the heart is depressed, even to utter a *form of words*, which conveys and implies

the sentiment of gladness and thanksgiving ; much more to excite and sustain the thoughts by which such language is prompted.

There should seem little need to enjoin the duty of thanksgiving on those Christians, who, while on the one hand, they are unassailed by any acute pain or burdensome anxiety of this life, enjoy on the other hand, a vivid hope of heavenly blessedness ; or in whom, if the pains and anxieties of time become more severe, this pressure is overbalanced by a livelier foresight of the joys of eternity. Such persons, while these peculiar favours and supports are bestowed, must be, like the apostles, “ though sorrowful, yet always rejoicing ;” and it seems impossible that their gladness should not flow forth in fervent thanksgiving. But there is a state of mind, in which, without even imagining that we are in an absolute destitution of Christian faith and hope, and with a very deep sense of the *value* of these dispositions, we may yet find it exceedingly difficult to rejoice in their objects. This is often, at the least partly, to be ascribed to natural disorder or debility, either secretly arising from the inexplicable and refined sympathy of the mind and body, or from adverse events and circumstances which have affected both. In this state the imagination cannot freely act, but

is strongly drawn towards thoughts of fear, doubt, and sorrow.

Nor let it appear to disparage the genuineness or reality of the objects of religious joy, when the term *imagination* is used. However real and however great an object may be, whether earthly or heavenly, if it is not under the cognizance of the senses, imagination alone can set it in a lively manner before us. If it never has been subjected to the senses, and in our present state cannot be, then imagination can draw no aid from memory, and therefore requires to be more strongly awakened and exercised in order to embody it. The lively, *joyful* exercise of faith, is in effect an exercise not of belief alone, but of imagination likewise.

The apostle's expression, "we *look* at the things which are *unseen*," justifies this view of it. If we would exercise a vivid apprehensive faith, even in an object *purely* spiritual, as in the Infinite Spirit himself, it must be not by bare belief, but by an attempt to conceive or *image* to ourselves (though there be a necessary impropriety in this language, and in our narrow conceptions) the attributes and operations of a perfect mind. And with regard to all *other* celestial objects, we are compelled to view them under images of matter, and form, and place, in order to attain any thing like distinctness, or

reality of conception. — These imaginations are always, no doubt, more or less erroneous, as they are necessarily founded on human and earthly resemblances alone ; but while we may be quite conscious, and properly so, that the imagination of a glorious object, as of the exalted Mediator, of the heavenly regions, or of their inhabitants, is, of necessity, very far from being either adequate or correct, it will yet be right and profitable (within certain bounds) to cherish and encourage it, as producing a joy and thankfulness, which, without its aid, could not have been awakened.—There are seasons, when to some Christians, it is most arduous to do this ; nay, to some it is habitually difficult : probably the minds in which an extravagance or excess of imagination, in regard to revealed objects, prevails, are few in comparison with the number in which the conception of them is faint and languid.

Cannot I then excite myself into the delightful temper of praise and joy, by endeavouring to place before my mental eye, the actual appearance and aspect of the Son of God on earth, when he came in the fulness of his compassion, “ to seek and save the lost ; ”—when he assumed the form of a servant, and, through that veil of humiliation, his revering followers beheld his spiritual glory, “ the

glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth?" Can I not image him to myself, as addressing from the smooth lake the more still and breathless multitudes,—or dispensing to them miraculous supplies of food in that grassy seclusion of the wilderness,—or gloriously transfigured on the mountain before his astonished followers?—Cannot I trace, in every look, the ineffable union of dignity and tenderness;—and view the paralytic arising at his word;—and the blind rejoicing, at his touch, in the first beams of day;—and see in all his works the lively emblems of his far higher purpose, to heal the spiritual diseases, and conquer the spiritual death of a race that is self-destroyed?

Can I not find matter of grateful rejoicing even when stationed in thought by the brook Cedron, or "by the cross of Jesus," and gazing on that meek and glorious sufferer, whose passion of unknown weight, and unsearchable intenseness, but transient and for ever past, there achieved "the joy set before him," and "made propitiation for the sins of a world!"

And can I think, without delight, of this Redeemer ascended and interceding, having "led captivity captive, and received gifts for men," "sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on

high," preparing heavenly mansions for his humblest followers? Can I anticipate, without joyful emotion, his second coming, to receive these followers unto himself? Even now he appears in "the presence of God for us,"

" Our Advocate before the throne,
And our Forerunner there."

But what will it be to be personally received by that sacred and sovereign Deliverer, to whom we shall owe all that eternity can impart?

If I cannot conceive the near and transporting interview with a Benefactor so august, let me think, at least, of some joyful messenger, commissioned to prepare my exulting, yet trembling spirit, for the honour and the joy! Let me picture, in thought, a kind celestial guide, leading me (and those dearest to me) through some majestic avenue, towards the throne of his glory; a throne not decorated by the feeble devices of art, but formed, and surrounded, and approached, by the sublimest imagery of nature. Let silent forests and shadowy mountains be the vista, and radiant clouds the canopy, and these, "and all the dread magnificence of heaven," but mere appendages to the majesty of Him, who, thus enthroned amidst the noblest wonders of creation, unveils the far nobler

symbols and expressions of his own transcendent attributes ;—and *thence* let me hear his mild, though awful voice, saying, (as once to his disciples on earth,)—" Be of good cheer, it is I !"

If we could rise to a lively conception of scenes like these, would our worship be unaccompanied by ardent thankfulness and sacred joy ?

XII.

ON THE DUTY OF MAKING EVERY PART OF PRIVATE WORSHIP SPECIFIC.

PRAYER is then most likely to degenerate into a mere form, when I allow myself to rest in *general* praises, confessions, and supplications. The memory is so furnished with these, that the employment, when thus conducted, may include scarcely any exercise of the understanding ; and still less of the affections. In public, and social, and even in domestic prayer, a much greater degree of generality is obviously necessary, than in secret worship ; but in this last I should be careful to shun it. When I acknowledge the goodness of God, let me dwell not only on every more occasional and signal experience of it ; but, in the ordinary course of my life, let me thoughtfully select, as peculiar topics of praise, those possessions and privileges, which

from my circumstances or temper, I most highly value. Do I, for example, especially need the counsels and supports of *friendship*? I have reason to make it an especial subject of thanksgiving, that I have never been without a true or confidential friend. Would the loss of *sight* be, in my case, a peculiarly grievous privation? Then I should, in a peculiar manner, bless the Divine Preserver, that this faculty is fully possessed, or has been so little impaired.

Still more should this particularity be the distinctive character of secret worship in regard to *confession*; that being the branch of devotion, which, when engaged in socially, requires to be most *general*. We cannot, in society, confess our own particular sins, as if they were the sins of others also; and even if we could ascertain that some present had cause to make precisely the same confessions with ourselves, they might often be of a nature quite unsuited to publicity. But when I “enter into my closet, and shut the door,” it is of great importance that my confessions should be specific; that I should recal and acknowledge my most prevailing and most recent offences, so distinctly and circumstantially as to bring them strongly before the eye of the mind. I should notice their particular causes and aggravations; not

yielding to the erroneous notion that such details are inconsistent with the majesty of Him whom I address. He knoweth all things ; and no detail can be superfluous or unfit in his estimation, which tends to fix my spirit more deeply and repentingly on its own moral defects and diseases, and to evince more strongly its desire of being “ made whole.” If, for example, I am conscious of having lately given way to an anxious and impatient temper, let me not be content with acknowledging generally, that I have not “ ruled my own spirit,” but let me confess that I have not set a due guard in that particular instance, where provocation or trial was to be expected ; or that I have betrayed heat or peevishness where the youth, or old age, or ignorance, or known infirmity, or other circumstances of the party with whom I had intercourse, should have operated as a strong prevention.—If I have indulged sinful musings and desires, I should call to mind, and express, the immediate source of temptation ; such as injurious society, or pernicious books ; (whether casually presented, or more deliberately approached ;) or the want of a right occupation, or a distaste of what is good, prompting the unsatisfied or slothful spirit to resort for enjoyment to what is evil. It will be both an exercise and an

incentive of penitence, to trace and to declare these motives before God.

If I have to charge myself with the omission or delay of some known duty, or with having performed it negligently, it is not enough to say in secret, what may suffice in public, “I have left undone the things which I ought to have done;” I should rather acknowledge to the Searcher of hearts,—*This* duty, which conscience urged on me, I have deferred, through indolence and self-indulgence; and in *that*, which I nominally performed, the most difficult or important part was scarcely attempted, through false shame and imagined incompetence.—Or if I confess, *more* generally, the transgressions of past months and years, or even of the whole course of life since I became an accountable agent, still let my retrospect and my confession be as particular as the case admits. There has been, doubtless, one kind of sin which has *most* frequently or successfully assailed me, which has been inwrought, as it were, into the very texture of my constitution and habit; and there may be yet another and another, which the review of my own experience will shew to have been often prevalent. Now, even in what may be called a *general* confession, these predominant evils

should be distinguished and specified. Their being so will give a realizing and substantial character to my acknowledgments of guilt, and will deepen the corresponding sentiments and desires. For it is evident, that specific confessions prepare the way for specific *supplications*. If I only confess sin generally, though it were with many repetitions of the same words, or with many variations which are little more than verbal, I do not lay the foundation for particular requests. But there is no object more important in secret worship, than the seeking divine help and strength against each particular evil, against each wrong habit or disposition of which I am conscious ; and the kind of confession which I have now been considering, naturally and almost necessarily leads to a similar kind of petition ; namely, that the Holy Spirit would succour and strengthen me against that particular sin which has been explicitly acknowledged, would excite in me those particular motives and convictions, by which it may be repressed, and impart that especial grace, or temper of soul, which may expel or subdue it. Thus, if I confess the unhappy prevalence of discontent, respecting a particular branch of the duties which Providence has assigned me, or concerning an especial disadvantage attendant on my lot in life ; such confession will scarcely fail to

be followed by especial prayer, that I may henceforth learn to meet the difficulty, or endure the inconvenience referred to, with an unrepining and more acquiescent mind ; that I may habitually compare this trial with the greater trials of some around me ; that I may consider how utterly unentitled I am to ask a dispensation from this, or from much severer duties and crosses, on the ground of desert ; and that I may more approvingly and practically consent to that view of the present life, which the scripture gives, as designed to be a state of labour and conflict. And so, in every other instance, specific confession, if it be heartfelt, will be succeeded by specific petition ; and each may, in secret, be far *more* detailed than the hints which have now been given ; because it is, of course, not the object of these general reflections to enter upon individual and actual examples. It should also be remembered that prayer, besides its direct efficacy, is undoubtedly productive of indirect good ; as being the most solemn kind of *meditation*, the most serious review of our strong reasons for gratitude, submission, and diligence in “ well doing,” and of the various moral and spiritual evils which we have to resist ; involving a resolution practically to foster the one class of habits, and to oppose the other. But this indirect advantage of devotion must

wholly depend on its *specific* character ; and therefore, it may be added, must chiefly attach to that which is secret.

We can easily conceive of great *direct efficacy* in the briefest and most general prayer, if offered with the whole heart ; but in order to those *indirect* benefits, there must be a distinct recollection of the blessings which are to be appreciated, and the duties which are to be pursued : above all, there must be a clear recognition of the evil tempers to be resisted, the temptations to be encountered, the occasions to be shunned, the passions to be moderated or controlled. It is only when thus conducted, that secret worship can be in the highest sense a profitable and reasonable service, whether we regard its primary aim, or its secondary tendency. It will then be most remote from "vain repetitions," most reverential towards the God who heareth prayer, and most beneficial to ourselves.

XIII.

ON AIMING AT LARGE VIEWS OF THE PREVALENCE OF GOOD IN THE UNIVERSE, AS DEDUCIBLE FROM THE REVEALED PERFECTIONS OF ITS AUTHOR.

IF the Scottish “minstrel” boy, whose genius and sensibility have been so attractively delineated by Beattie, (himself perhaps partly the model of the character he drew,) had been born and bred up on a ground-floor, in one of the closest “wynds” of the Scottish capital, detained by some cruel guardian in perpetual servitude at a sedentary trade, surrounded by dismal and repulsive objects, and purposely kept in deep ignorance of

“the boundless store
Of charms which nature to her votary yields ;”

we can suppose what a confused desire and melancholy veneration would have possessed his mind, as he saw the sun, and moon, and stars, crossing by turns that narrow section of the pure sky, which was visible between the dark towering walls around him ;—imagine him then, on some happy night, suddenly liberated, and conducted before dawn to the summit of “ Arthur’s seat,” there, in full freedom, to view the day breaking on the whole expanse of the heavens, the Forth magnificently widening to the sea, its bordering towns and busy navigation, the noble city beneath him, and the varied plains and woods, mountains and islands, which combine to form that great *panorama* ; and think what a new conception of nature and art, what a tide of delight and wonder, would rush into his spirit at the sight !—But is not this, in some sort, an emblem, and yet a very imperfect one, of the contrast of a Christian’s present and approaching state, as to his view of the *spiritual* creation ? We are here on earth confined in a narrow scene, which evil has pervaded : doomed by our fallen and mortal condition, to see and converse with nothing earthly, but what this bane of happiness has, in some measure, touched with its contaminating power. There is, indeed, through the great mercy of God, a pure and heavenly light of divine

knowledge, glancing on us from above, if we will but raise the mental eye to meet it, amidst all this moral gloom, and through the hazy atmosphere of ignorance and depravation. But when we shall suddenly be borne away, each through some one of the thousand dark avenues of death, to a wide and free survey of the *spiritual* world, will not the astonishing and transporting contrast be incomparably greater, than that which would delight the supposed captive?

In the meanwhile, let it not be forgotten, that the spiritual light of revelation, which has reached our minds, is a much more *informing* light as to the prevailing character of the spiritual universe, than the natural light could be to that young bondsman, while so immured, as to the character and aspect of the material world. Revelation has, in some degree, though in a figurative manner, intimated to us the glories and felicities of other regions; but, which is far more important than any such intimations, it has made us acquainted with the moral perfection of God; with that sovereign and infinite principle of *good*, which is greater than the universe, and which must eternally forbid that evil should predominate, or, in any large and relative sense, abound.

It is not to be concealed, that the whole volume

of revelation, whether as it proclaims the hatred of the Supreme Being to sin, or relates his past severity against transgressors, or denounces his threatenings as to futurity, or, above all, declares that amazing sacrifice, by which his judicial indignation against guilt has been manifested, does unfold a far more awful view of the nature of moral evil, and the misery of its unprevented result, and consequently, of the spiritual state of a world which is “become guilty before God,” than was or could have been discovered by the depraved reason or conscience of man;—but then it should be ever and attentively recollected, that the very *same* record by which this melancholy state of mankind, as partakers of a ruined nature, and obnoxious to condemnation, is unfolded, reveals likewise, and alone reveals, that infinite moral perfection of the Maker and Preserver of all things, from which we cannot but infer the greatest possible perfection in his works and designs. It should be considered that we have no whit *more* revealed evidence, no *other* or *stronger* scriptural testimony of the deep malignity of sin, and the dreadful penalties which will be annexed to it where unforsaken, than we have of the infinite holiness, goodness, love, and happiness of Him that ruleth over all; whence it is unavoidable to

infer an immense,* if not infinite preponderance of good, and that for ever, in the universe which he rules. Indeed, the terrible fact itself, that sin, and its consequent misery, are so repugnant to the will and government of God, as to have needed and received an infinite atonement, involves the conclusion, that sin and misery, even as introduced into this minute portion of his works, form a dreadful infraction of the universal order, a tremendous anomaly in itself, though permitted for the wisest and most benevolent end, as being indispensable to the greatest final good. We have, therefore, strong reason to be confident, that the entrance of sin and misery is a rare exception to the prevailing perfection and stability of moral beings.

Since the Deity, as revealed to us in his word, has all natural and moral perfections, that is to say, all the attributes which constitute and produce happiness, it is inconceivable but that the sentient creation, as a whole, must ultimately, as to the sum of natural and moral good or happiness, correspond, in the highest possible degree,

* Although the word *immense* is used by some of the best writers as controvertible with *infinite*, yet, as it may well bear the lower sense, of that which is unmeasured or not measurable by us, (which seems also to be its popular acceptation,) I have in the present piece made this use of it, and of its derivatives.

to the character of Him who formed and upholds it. The moral evil which exists, is, indeed, a mighty mass to us, who see nothing on earth that appears to be unmingled with it, or wholly unaffected by it; and could we much more clearly apprehend its extent, and its depth, in human society and human hearts, and estimate its penal consequences, it would then be a sight insupportable for our limited minds; which are always chiefly, and sometimes exclusively, affected, by what is known, and perceived, and at hand. He who sees a volcano showering its ashes on his native city, or a cloud of locusts, twenty leagues in breadth, darkening the whole sky, and spreading famine through the plains, will not easily reflect with attention and pleasure on the safety of a thousand other cities, or the unravaged fertility and plenty of whole regions and continents. But difficult as it is,—while we look on a “world that lieth in wickedness,” and a whole terrestrial creation participating its penal effects,—to expatiate, in fixed and rejoicing thought, over a pure and happy universe: yet faith and reason may rest assured, from the revealed character of God, that the sum of evil can be relatively but minute, being certainly the least *possible*:—and should nay one, professing a steadfast belief in the moral perfection of the

Deity, assume (in the total absence of scriptural proofs or intimations) that this *least possible* sum of evil in the universe may yet be great, relatively to the amount of good, the assumption would not only be devoid of all ground of credibility, but would involve (as I apprehend) a gloomy speculative profaneness.

Let us then aim at the *widest* views ; for they are the most effectual to cheer and sustain the meditative mind. Unless we habitually seek to measure the superabundance of good, almost by the infinitude of its Author ; we are in danger of being “ shaken and troubled,” by the apparent magnitude and probable effects of evil. But if we could steadfastly adopt and maintain this just view of things, evil would become a sort of vanishing quantity. For even though the multitude of intelligent or sentient beings should be *not* infinite, which, understanding that word in the sense of ever-growing, or increasing *without end*, we can be no way certain that it *will* not be ;* and even though there were *several* races of beings, beside our own, subjected to moral and natural evil, which, however, we can have no right to presume that there are,—yet might the proportion of evil to

* See Note D, at the end of the volume.

good, in the whole of the divine works, be but as a rivulet to the ocean.

A Christian, called as he evidently is, by his Divine Master's example and command, to reflect deeply on the evil that is in the world, in order to shun its influence, to escape its effects, and to aim at the diminution of its prevalence, will be liable to receive too gloomy and disheartening an impression from the view of its wide dominion, unless he can launch forth into contemplations of a contrary character, which are far more wide and vast.

Should one of our female philanthropists, from a misjudging devotedness to her object, instead of visiting the prison and the hospital, bind herself to constant *residence* within one of these, as nuns within their convents, it is hardly to be doubted, that a more oppressive sense of human wretchedness and calamity would weigh upon her mind. It would be more and more necessary to correct this feeling, by a frequent effort of reflection on the great excess of health and freedom, over disease and bondage, which is found in the whole city, or the whole island.

And we who, at the dictate of revelation, contemplate the world in which we *dwell* as a great infirmary and house of discipline, and one where

the fatal cases exceed the happy cures have, surely, need to counteract the feeling which this situation prompts, by all the resources which the same revelation yields. It is probable, that superior and happy beings regard this abode into which evil has entered, and that abode where sin is punished, as we should regard a solitary hospital and prison in a vast and well-ordered and flourishing capital; though indeed, with this most joyful difference, that in the other countless mansions which they visit or behold, throughout the immeasurable “city of the living God,” they witness, we trust, not a partial, but a total exclusion of moral evil.

The astronomy which has developed the incalculable magnitude of creation, is, in this view, *auxiliary* to our faith; for, in proportion as our knowledge is enlarged, as to the actual vastness of the divine works, a correspondence in *facts* (or in the existing universe) is discovered, so far, with the inferences we would draw from the revelation of the divine character.

Had the stars been neither mentioned in scripture, nor visible in nature, still, from the moral perfection of Deity, which is distinctly revealed, we should be led to believe in an immense predominance of happiness *somewhere*;—but, seeing a host of heavenly worlds, and learning that their

number is beyond all computing, we make one grand advance towards our conclusion, on the ground of ocular and mathematical proof. Faith is relieved, as it were, from its work of creation. The mighty structure of innumerable worlds is before us. Divine wisdom and power have actually done what we otherwise should only have judged they would do; nay, the boldest conception of faith, or of fancy, would never have gone a ten thousandth part so far as the fact carries us. Here is ample *room*, then, in the *actual* works of the Deity, for a preponderance of happiness which may well be called, to our feeble apprehension, infinite. The Deity is “just” and “holy,”—“good” and “gracious,” yea,—“God is love:” while we believe this, (and be it remembered, that when we cease to do so, *all* belief in revelation falls,) it is impossible not to believe that such an immense preponderance of happiness is both produced and secured.

This vastness of the works of God also evidently magnifies the love and condescension of their Author, in interposing, even by his providence, much more by the astonishing method of redemption, on behalf of our fallen world; which, had it been annihilated in its state of moral ruin, might have been, to other beings, but as a meteor gliding

into darkness, from amidst the multitudinous grandeur of the heavens. And when we consider the ultimate, and even the present efficacy of that marvellous interposition, towards the recovery and salvation of *mankind*, as far more extensive than some persons of an austere or excluding spirit can allow themselves to hope, we dissipate, in part, the gloom even of this world's prospect.

It is not, however, this world's state or prospect to which we should confine ourselves, or on which we have now sought to dwell. It is a scene immensely greater ; and to that greater, that universal view, it is the proper tendency of every *devotional* engagement to exalt us. For whenever we pray we have always for the grand object of thought, (if our thoughts be truly elevated and expanded towards the perfections of Him whom we worship,) an infinitely good and infinitely happy Creator ;—why not also, as a concurring or proximate object of thought, that which is necessarily to be inferred from the idea of such a Creator, the utmost possible sum of goodness and felicity in his creation ? We should be deeply grateful for that revelation which *assures* us of the moral perfection of God :* without it, although our knowledge of sin and its

* See Note E, at the end of the volume.

deserts would have far less of painful distinctness, we should be left in a dreadful uncertainty as to the extent and duration of evil. We could not disprove that it prevails in *all* parts of the creation, and that it will every where and continually augment. We should, indeed, know much less of (what the human mind has so great a repugnance to admit) the *malignant essence* of evil, its contrariety to the *divine* nature and will; but *therefore*, (on that very account,) we could not know that its dominion must be limited, and that good must immensely preponderate.

Deists may offer strong arguments in proof of a certain kind of divine perfection; but there is no ground to believe that they who altogether reject revelation have real confidence in the moral attributes of Deity; and it follows, that they must remain either in fearful doubt, or stupid thoughtlessness, as to the ultimate issues of good and ill.

A Christian, on the contrary, may confidently regard all the evil, which is, or can be permitted by a God of holiness and love, as indispensably conducive to the production and maintenance of a good that will incomparably overbalance it. He sees in the *works* of Christ, in his perfect rectitude, purity,

and benevolence, an “image” of the perfections “of the invisible God;” he has been taught by the *words* of Christ, that the divine goodness so transcends that of all creatures, as to be in fact the *only* essential goodness; “None is good, save one, that is *God*.”

From these assurances of Him, who is one with the Father, and who attested his words by *miracles* of goodness, the Christian may, I think, without presumption conclude, that if the universe, viewed by prescience in its whole extent and duration, had not been foreseen to contain an incomparable excess of good, the eternally good and blessed God would never have become a Creator.

We know that the follower of Christ cannot, in one sense, be too much *occupied* with the existence of moral evil; he cannot too strenuously oppose and conflict against it, in himself and others, nor can he have any spring of action so truly identical with that which reigned in the soul of his Saviour, as a pure desire of preventing or counteracting its diversified effects. Yet, in contemplation, it is his duty often to “turn aside,” and see a far *greater* sight; to anticipate the period when evil shall not only be extinguished in himself, but shall for ever cease to be prominent, perhaps even to be percep-

tible, in his view of the creation; and to lose all his present partial views in that “far more exceeding and eternal weight” of felicity, which will be as exhaustless as the perfection of Him that “fillet all in all.”

XIV.

ON TORPOR OF MIND WITH REGARD TO SPIRITUAL OBJECTS AND INTERESTS.

WHEN is it most necessary for me to meditate on things spiritual? Precisely when I have least inclination and ability to do so; when I take up the scriptures, or a book of piety, with almost as little zest as I should a treatise of mensuration; when I seem unimpressible by what is exalted, or remote, or refined; when the mind, like what has been named the “sensitive soul” in the lower creatures, is little better than the mere instrument of the animal, instead of the animal powers and organs being the mere instruments of the spirit. This, to one that has known and felt any thing of its opposite, is a humiliating and comfortless

state of the understanding and affections. What can account for it, but that prone and servile tendency of the human soul, induced by its fall from original rectitude? For, by the supposition, this is not a state of ignorance, nor is it, properly speaking, a state of *unbelief*, as to the reality and excellency of spiritual objects; since, were it either of these, there could be in it no conscious unhappiness or degradation. It is, in fact, far otherwise. The immensity and majesty of nature have been familiar to my eye, and the glorious secrets which the universe must have to unfold, have been contemplated with awful curiosity. The proofs of its incomprehensible Author's being and perfections, have approved themselves to my reason and my conscience; the vastness and condescension of his revealed love have overwhelmed my thoughts; the possible discoveries of an endless life have oppressed me with their undisclosed multitude and grandeur, and this little theatre of sense has seemed to shrink into nothing.—And am I yet now compelled to say, with an application of the phrase sadly contrary to the connexion in which an apostle used it, “None of *these* things move me?” How contrary this to the genuine uncontrolled bias of that new and heavenly nature, which the scripture declares to belong to the children of God?—I am like a travel-

ler who has passed along the Appenine ridge, sometimes gazing on the far-empurpled sky, now on the vast masses of southern foliage below, and a bright river dividing the extended valley, then on the calm lake or boundless ocean stretching beyond, and who exclaims, with a glowing heart, How delightful, how magnificent ! but soon afterwards finds himself enveloped in the chill vapour of the *mal-aria*, and looks in vain through the noxious mist, for all the wonders and glories of that splendid prospect. There is danger for the traveller, not only from the unwholesome air through which he passes, but lest, forgetting the refined enjoyments of other hours, he should seek amends in sensuality, for the lost pleasures of contemplation. But there is, in one view, more danger for me ; because, in his case, the concealment of the objects does not take away or impair the conviction of their reality. But in mine, there is a sort of doubting, though not disbelief, induced by the want of mental perception. Suspended apprehension, respecting spiritual or “unseen” objects, is very much allied to doubt.*

If it be possible for a reasoner, by dint of subtleties, to bring into question, as the estimable but

* At least, they are closely allied in practical effect.

paradoxical Bishop Berkeley did, the existence of “the things which *are* seen,” how much more easy, through a cessation of the mind’s acting upon objects of mere intellect, to lose all realizing sense of “the things which are *not* seen.” There may be, and is, no actual, at least, no abiding disbelief in *either* case. Bishop Berkeley, it is presumed, could only in a very occasional state of high abstraction from the influence of material things, seriously feel as if that opinion were credible, which his dialogues maintain; and it is only in the state exactly opposite, that of absorption in material things, (when the appetites and varying states of the body, or thoughts only terminating on what is earthly, quell and suppress the higher action of the soul,) that we are dead to the impression of what is spiritual. But from the lamentable readiness with which, in our degenerate condition, we take impressions, and even laws from sense, this last is a *common* and *natural* state, while that of Berkeley, if he really doubted, or imagined himself to doubt the existence of matter, has been, probably, unparalleled in any sane mind. If I conclude, that he never *could* be under this illusion, it equally serves the present purpose to suppose, that some student of his system, whose sanity need not be contended for, sometimes really was so. There

is, we too well *know*, a contrary unsoundness of mind, which, though it excites no wonder and no ridicule in a sensual world, is in truth infinitely more to be deplored ; that of feeling as if things *spiritual* had no existence. The herds of Babylon might naturally soon cease to wonder, if they ever wondered at all, that its sovereign should take “ his portion with the beasts in the grass of the earth, and have his body wet with the dew of heaven ; ”* but an angel, ever blissfully awake to the realities and glories of the spiritual universe, probably regards the “ brutish persons ” who are dead to these, with more astonishment and compassion than I should regard that visionary, who might feel as if the *material* world were non-existent. No doubt these remarks apply most strongly to such as are manifestly not “ renewed in the spirit of their mind,” who are altogether what the Apostle Paul denominates natural or animal men ; but still they apply, in a degree, to that temporary and partial insensibility, which it is presumed every Christian must confess.

And what, as a means, (in the hope of divine aid and influence,) is likely to remove this ?

If the deluded follower of Berkeley had arrived

* Daniel, iv.

at such a point of self-deception in his study, as to feel some repugnance to eat or walk, or to have little fear of a precipice, from imagining these acts and objects unreal, what would be the fittest remedy for *him*? Not, I conceive, to take a general and distant view of nature, even in its most striking scenes,—but to lift some hard and massive body, to make proof of some highly pungent taste, to try the point of some sharp instrument.

Have we any resources similar to these, when we would seek to revive the deadened apprehension of *spiritual* things? They, it is evident, cannot be corporeally tasted, touched, or handled. But there are two ways of mentally viewing them, which have some analogy to the two ways of being conversant with material things, that were just mentioned.—I may attempt to contemplate the most sublime, illimitable, and *remote* of spiritual objects, to meditate on the nature and operation of Deity, on the person of Christ, or on the day of judgment, on “the eternal states of all the dead;” and all these things, momentous as they are, may (without being disbelieved) appear, in the carnalized state of mind to which we refer, as immense indeed, but shadowy and almost doubtful visions, which have no power to excite emotion.—Let me rather try, therefore, without looking abroad into the vast

field of spiritual existence, to fix on a single point, and that the *nearest*. Let me return, with Descartes and Fenelon, to the *first* point of spiritual knowledge,—“ I think, therefore, I *am* ;” not for their purpose, of deducing thence the proof of an infinite and perfect Being, but for the purpose of intently recognizing my own *consciousness*. This consciousness is *one*. It is not divisible or dissoluble, like the material organs which it actuates, and which will so soon be dissolved. When a few years have passed, the whole frame will sink into irremediable helplessness ; the last pulses will beat, the last respiration cease, the particles so wonderfully combined into organic life will be separated. Even *they*, however, will be only separated, not destroyed. “ We have no reason to believe, (say the philosophers,) that matter perishes, but only that it changes its form.” “ There is no evidence of the *destruction* of *any* thing since the universe was formed.” But my consciousness, which is not composed of parts, cannot be separated. And if matter which has parts, which is infinitely divisible, which is actually divided, be not destroyed, how much less that consciousness, which is one and indivisible. To annihilate, for aught we know, is as much a divine and incommunicable prerogative, as to create ; nor have we the slightest evidence,

direct or presumptive, that this prerogative has been exercised on one material particle, or one spiritual essence. When this frame is dissolved, therefore, as it soon inevitably must, my consciousness will still subsist. I, who think, shall *be* ;— shall be *somewhere* ; shall *reflect* ; shall *feel* ; shall be either *happy* or *unhappy*.—It is a striking thought of a foreign writer, that even atheism cannot demonstrate to itself, on its own principles, that there will be no future and ever-during misery. As little, surely, can that vague and Epicurean sort of deism, which forgets God, or asks itself secretly, Does God indeed see and *regard* ?*— which is yet the virtual state of the Christian's mind, whenever its actings are sinful. Even could this questioning be unhappily converted into a well-founded affirmation ; could it be shewn that the proofs of God's holy providence are fallacious ; this dreadful argument would not at all involve the consequence that the spirit is destroyed, while the parts of the body are only dissolved and changed ; or that it has parts which may also be dissolved ; or that its consciousness, in a new state, will not be unhappy.

The resort to this kind of reasoning does not

* Psalm xciv. 7. Ezekiel viii. 12.

imply either distrust or depreciation of that testimony which the gospel yields both to the character of the Deity and “the life of the world to come :” it is intended for those moments when external reasons of belief and expectation, however powerful, do not *move* the mind ; intended likewise, by impressing that awful prospect of an *unknown* futurity of being, to endear the assurances and offers of revelation. Whatever depraved or listless torpor lulls my spirit now, that surprising instant will arrive, surely and soon, that instant of miraculous change, the first of a *new* mode of being. Can I easily revert in recollection to the hours of early childhood, when my *present* mode of being was new ; and is it much less easy to anticipate the latest moments of *this*, the awful verge of another ? —Am I not, meanwhile, consciously amenable to an inward law ? Is not the sense of moral good and evil, of consequent weal or woe, more indelible from my spirit than words imprinted “with an iron graver in the rock,” or on crystal “with the point of a diamond ?” What is it but the never-dying echo of the eternal voice ? These things are fully as sure as any thing material and external, any object of sensation, and incomparably more intimate and unchangeable. But if I be truly awakened to these, if I forethink this ap-

proaching entrance into an untried state of consciousness, which must be either holy or depraved, which must excite unmeasured joy or unutterable disappointment,—can I, under such expectations, remain indifferent to the message of salvation, to the deeds and words of an Almighty Redeemer? *Thus*, then, let me seek to arouse the dormant perception of spiritual realities, commencing the survey *at home*, contemplating the mysterious immortal inmate of my bosom. *Hence* let me ascend towards the throne of Him who is hid from mortal sight; *hence* fly to the cross of Him who stooped to mortal sorrows. But, oh, Thou Spirit of Holiness, who succourest mortal weakness, do Thou communicate to my soul the vividness of solemn thought, the depth of grateful sentiment, and cause me by thy power, which is alone sufficient, to “abound in hope.”

XV.

ON THE ENCOURAGEMENT WHICH THE INTER- CESSION OF CHRIST AFFORDS TO PRAYER.

WHEN I consider how defective, how mean, and how defiled are the most solemn of my devotional services, I might well despond of their being any way acceptable to the Deity, or procuring for me any communication of his mercy and favour, were it not for the peculiar way of access and acceptance revealed. Not only my previous character of an offender, but the offences contained in acts of worship, might suffice to defeat my hopes. If a petitioner were to approach the most exalted, benevolent, and venerable of men, without manifesting any due impression of his dignity and excellence; if he were visibly and audibly to manifest the contrary, by unseemly gestures, and by wander-

ing, incoherent, and even disgraceful expressions, mingling in every part of his professed supplication ; if that supplication, though not a precomposed form, were evidently, in many of its parts, mechanical ; a sort of half-conscious exercise of memory, combined with vague desire ; while the mind was chiefly occupied with the irrelevant and often base imaginations, which seemed interposed as insults to the majesty and patience of the hearer ;—what should we augur of the reception and success of such a suppliant ? Would not the servants or the friends of the personage addressed, be ready to remove the intruder, unanswered except by reproof ?—But my addresses, to One who is ineffably more august and venerable than any created being, have often corresponded to this description, and have always, more or less, partaken of this character. For thoughts and feelings, not vocally expressed, are quite as substantial and apparent before the Omniscient God, as those which are uttered ; they form, undeniably, as real a part of the action of the mind, during any act of worship, as the confessions, petitions, or adorations, verbally pronounced. What then would be the texture and series of my prayers, if all the ideas and emotions which arise during their continuance, could be submitted to the view of others,

and my own, as they unquestionably are to the view of Him “that searcheth the hearts?” Would not the irreverent confusion and impious intermixture, of things sacred and profane, solemn and trivial, spiritual and carnal, be enough to mortify the pride of a Stoic, and confound the self-righteousness of a Pharisee? If such a copy of the acts of my soul, during secret devotion, could be faithfully noted down, and set before me, it would certainly confirm, in a most humbling manner, my conviction of spiritual weakness and depravity, and might justly induce despair of such services being well-pleasing to God; were it not for the consoling and cheering assurance that Jesus “ever liveth to make intercession for us:” that “we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, though without sin.” It is in this belief alone, that I can or ought, to “come boldly unto the throne of grace:” but *with* this belief, notwithstanding the experience and the foresight of exceeding imperfection and unworthiness in my offerings, I may “have access with confidence.” How should it endear this great High Priest and Advocate, to think of Him as pleading for the gracious acceptance of my praises, which, when compared with

the claims of the divine grace and majesty, have been so negligent and formal ; of my thanksgivings, which have been so heartless ; of my confessions, which have been so seldom prompted by a deep and tender contrition ; of my entreaties, whose fervency has borne no proportion to the magnitude of the good besought, or of the evils deprecated ; of my whole worship, which, as before described, has been often a shameful intermingling of incongruous and degrading thoughts with those of piety ! Is it presumptuous to hope and believe, that the Divine Mediator intercedes for those who are conscious of defects so vital, and offences so flagrant, in their approaches to Him who “ knoweth the secrets of the heart ? ” I trust not ; because many of the most *devoted* worshippers have confessed and deplored similar defects and offences in their attempts to wait on God ; and though I cannot suppose, that in these eminent Christians they have been nearly so habitual or so great, I am not warranted in desponding of my prayers as insincere and ineffectual, on account of the deeper degrees of evil which I may believe to pervade them. The compassionate aid and intercession of Christ, when on earth, were not withdrawn from those disciples with whom he had frequent reason to expostulate on account of the

weakness and littleness of their faith ; and who, in a season peculiarly adapted to excite their feelings, drew from him, by their heaviness and stupor, the affecting rebuke, “ What, could ye not watch with me one hour ? ” These failures of their faith and vigilance did not prevent his leaving with them that animating promise, “ Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”

At the same time, the hope that my imperfect and sinful offerings are accepted through this all-powerful and gracious Intercessor, can never, surely, admit so fatal a perversion, as to become a plea or refuge for indifference in that sacred employ ; to place me at *ease* in the indulgence of wandering thoughts, in a supine or ungoverned state of the faculties and affections. Let me solemnly remember, that, in every act of worship, whether public or secret, there is only *so much* of prayer as the “ understanding and the spirit ” concur in. It is impossible to suppose, that our exalted Saviour, who expressly declares,—“ they that worship God, must worship him in spirit and in truth,” should intercede for the acceptance of *those parts* of our prayers, in which, though the lips utter them, the mind is *not* engaged ; or in which, although the memory and the reason, by a confused kind of co-operation, combine to produce

them extemporaneously, the desires and affections are wholly unconcerned.

The efficacy of prayer must be proportioned to the real amount of sincere and true devotion, which enters into any exercise of worship. If a mass of gold or silver ore be sent to the refiner, he will value, not the amount or variety of heterogeneous matter, but the amount of pure metal which is found in it. He may accept and prize it, notwithstanding the alloys and worthless substances with which it is debased, but it can be accepted only at the worth of the separated bullion. It is not meant to intimate, by this comparison, that our prayers, were they ten times more unalloyed than those of fallen creatures can be, would possess any meritorious value: the mind and will, the ability and inclination, for these, as for all other services, are themselves the gift of God. But he has chosen to connect his blessings with prayer, and encourages me to hope, that, through the intercession of the "One Mediator," he will accept such prayers even as mine. Though they be, however, notwithstanding their alloys and defilements, accepted, yet the result of them, the blessings to be procured by them, can only have relation to the sum and the intenseness of real devotion. The hope that my real prayers

are presented, and made availing, by so glorious an advocate, should confer, in my estimation, an immense importance on the privilege of worship, and should make me incomparably more solicitous, that my prayers *may* be real, and that “out of the *abundance* of the heart, the mouth may speak.”

XVI.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF SLOTHFUL AND SENSUAL INCLINATIONS.

How disgraceful and wretched a subjugation is that of the mind to bodily appetites and propensities! How low and narrow are our ideas of happiness become, while we act or feel as if mere sensual ease, or animal indulgence, could supply it! When the spirit is “brought into subjection” to the body, what is its utmost bliss but that of a half-slumbering or half-besotted slave? And what captivity so ignominious as to be the slave of its own indolent, weak, disorderly vassal? What “servant of servants” can wear a yoke more abject? Whenever I am conscious of the downward tendency to this worst of servitudes, oppressed at once by the thought of its sinfulness and its degra-

dation, urgent, indeed, is the necessity of applying to the “Father of spirits” for strength to shake off the bondage of corruption. Have I forgotten that the blessedness of Him, who is independently and supremely happy, must be purely *spiritual*, and that we can conceive no remission of blissful *activity* in the Eternal Mind? What kind of enjoyment, then, should creatures, originally made “after his likeness,” endowed with spiritual faculties and desires, pursue as the best, the only perfect and sufficient, other than that which constitutes the happiness of their Creator?

Never, when the most ensnared in slothfulness and sensuality of heart, let me consent to suspend devotion; or fail to implore, with an early and strenuous resistance to the depraved bias of my mind, the renewal of that “right spirit,” which alone is “life and peace;” never let the inebriating or stupifying power of sense over-bear my conviction, that, under *this* dominion, the very life of life, the very element of heaven would be extinguished: never let me cease to solicit a new and deeper impression of those real joys, which arise from nearness and similitude and love to Thee, “the Source and Centre of all minds.” He who made and upholds all things, possesses within himself all the stores of happiness which are or can be

dispensed to his creation. His “loving-kindness is better than life.” What comparison can be made between pleasures in which reptiles partake, (partake without the cares or pains that are connected with them in *human* experience,) and those which flow immediately to the rational and immortal soul, from the infinite Spirit !

Even if, when I pray for these sublime enjoyments, they be not soon or amply communicated, yet ought the very hope, or even *desire*, of such exalted benefits, to be more cherished and more acceptable than the fullest possession of mere bodily delights. There must be more real satisfaction of the *mind* in perseveringly aspiring to the noblest, the only substantial and enduring good, although one were not to be indulged, in the present state, with any assurance or consciousness of its attainment, than in the full acquisition of pleasures which we know to be insufficient, mean, and transitory.

How forcibly does the energetic Baxter urge this preference of the all-originating good, and a sacred scorn of all that would compete with it ;—“ Where do you think, in reason, that all the streams of goodness do finally empty themselves ? Is it not in God, from whom, by secret springs, they finally proceed ? Where else do all the lines of goodness centre ? Are not all the sparks

contained in this fire, and all the drops in this ocean? Surely the time was, when there was nothing besides God, and then all good was in Him. And even now the creature's essence and existence is secondary, derived, contingent, improper, in comparison of his, *who is, and was, and is to come*, whose name alone is called *I am*. What do thine eyes see, or thy heart conceive desirable, which is not there to be had? Sin, indeed, there is none; but darest thou call that good? Worldly delights there are none, for they are good but for the present necessity, and please but the brutish senses.—Do you fear losing or parting with any thing you now enjoy? What? Do you fear you shall *want* when you come to *heaven*? Shall you want the drops when you have the ocean? or the light of the candle, when you have the sun? or the shallow creature, when you have the perfect Creator? ”*

It is while these powerful considerations least affect me, while I am most prone to sink under the influence of that “carnal mind which is death,” and my soul, immersed, and, as it were, half imbruted in earth and sense, knows not how to taste, and scarcely how to contemplate, a spiritual and real blessedness, that I have surely the most press-

* Saints' Rest, Part I. Chap. VI. § 9.

ing occasion to ask the heavenly gift, of better thoughts and nobler affections, from the Fountain of spiritual light and life. He can enkindle within me a divine ambition,—can cause my spirit to “thirst for Himself, even for the living God,”—for “the fulness of joy which is in his presence,”—for that perfect righteousness which is the essence of his own felicity. To Him, therefore, dull and insensible, or earthly and sensual, as I now am, to Him let me approach, with the deep feeling how essential to my happiness is his enlivening grace; and let this be the tenour of my earnest petition,—“My soul cleaveth unto the dust; quicken Thou me according to thy word!”

XVII.

ON THAT STRONG PRE-OCCUPATION OF THE
MIND WHICH UNFITS IT FOR DEVOTION; AND
ON THE MEANS OF COUNTERACTING IT.

THERE are some trials which press on us heavily, and yet do not, like many other occurrences, tend to disincline or disqualify us for prayer; on the contrary, though they give a special direction and cast to our petitions, they promote solemnity and fervour, and lead to that greater abstraction and composure which are the effect of increased seriousness. These are chiefly that kind of afflictive circumstances in which we are in a great measure *passive*; where the event has come, or must come, immediately from the hand of God; or where we are not much called to deliberate or to act. Such is the death or sickness of friends; such the ills or disappointments which they or we

may suffer from causes quite uncontrollable by us ; —such was the situation of Paul and his fellow voyagers, in the Alexandrian vessel, after they had been compelled to “let her drive,” had cast out her equipments, and, having no further power to direct her course, were “driven up and down in Adria;”—such that of the aged Jacob, when he was constrained to permit his Benjamin to be taken away to Egypt, and could only say, after an affecting prayer for his return, “If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved !” Who can doubt, that, when the youth was out of sight, when the melancholy train, which he followed with a father’s eye to the summit of some neighbouring mountain, had disappeared, he then offered more earnest and fixed and enlarged supplications for the safety of his beloved child ? Prayer was then his *only* duty, his only office of kindness, or resource of affection.

There is another class of trials, which, though they *ought* to have the same influence, and in the most pious minds certainly *have* so, yet have at the same time a contrary or disturbing force. It is that diversified class in which we are compelled to be *active* ; more especially those where speedy action is, or seems to be, required ; as where, for example, ourselves, or those dear to us, are in-

volved in embarrassing or hazardous circumstances, and must be extricated by means which require consideration and effort. Situations of *this* kind also are recorded in the lives of both the scripture characters referred to ; as when the patriarch heard of the approach of his offended brother with an armed band, and was in consequence “greatly afraid and distressed,” but obliged to decide on measures for his own and his family’s safety ; and as when the apostle, at Damascus, became acquainted with a conspiracy against his life, which required him to adopt means of concealment or escape.

These are occasions, (and there are many, far less pressing and important, that yet partake of the same character,) which, while they strongly prompt a good man to look up to God for strength and guidance, do yet, by the evident duty of action which they impose, tend to divert the mind from a calm and undivided exercise of devotion. At least they so operate on *some* minds ; and not so much on powerful, ardent, enterprising minds, formed for action, and which therefore we might suppose restless from impatience to begin it, as on those of an opposite complexion, to which decision and action are most arduous, and which are therefore most perturbed by the near prospect of such

duties. These will undoubtedly attempt prayer, perhaps, in many more *words* than the apostle or the patriarch, on similar occasions, uttered ; but their prayer will often be extremely distracted. Comparative brevity is suited to such occasions. Diffusiveness and prolixity are ill-timed : indeed, prayer can *never* be computed by the sum of words and minutes, but by the amount of faith, reverence, and desire. It is when *these* qualities seem lost amidst the confusion or perplexity of the worshipper, that the very *essence* of the duty appears wanting ; although, where this proceeds from mere infirmity, it will be mercifully regarded by Him who “ knoweth our frame.”

But it were well if only such exigencies could produce such effects. There are other feelings and situations, hardly deserving, in comparison, the name of trials, which, yet not seldom, excite in minds of the same temperament as high a degree of distraction, nay, sometimes, a yet higher ; because, being in themselves less urgent or critical, the need of divine aid is not so deeply felt, while the counteractive or alienating impulses of thought are almost equally strong. Thus, in deciding on some new occupation or connexion for ourselves or others, or meditating some arrangement in which the tempers and views of several persons are to be

consulted, the affairs in question may scarcely come under the grave denomination of “ trials,” and yet they may so possess the mind, as exceedingly to discompose it in sacred duties. Or, let some design engage us, which may be quite practicable, wholly blameless, or even praiseworthy,—such as a scheme of personal advantage, undertaken in the most proper manner, and with the most upright aim ; or a plan of administering charity or instruction, or an exercise of thought in some scientific or literary attempt, or a wish of publicly advocating some benevolent institution ; none of these can be called trials, in the religious acceptation of the word, for they may be pleasurable rather than painful ; nor can they, in themselves, be deemed temptations, for the supposed employments are “ lawful and right ;” and yet they may very readily *become* temptations ; for they may so engross and haunt the mind, as to incapacitate it for the right performance of duty to the Supreme Being.

It is far easier in this, as in many other cases, to feel, and understand, and analyze the evil, than it is to suggest (much more to use) effectual remedies. The poet tells me, that,

“ A soul immortal —————
Thrown into tumult, raptur’d or alarm’d,
At aught this scene can threaten or indulge,
Resembles ocean into tempest wrought,
To waft a feather, or to drown a fly.”

Nor can the calmest reason account this figure extravagant, in representing the disproportion between our little and momentary interests here, and the nature and prospects of a spirit which is to exist for ever.

But even supposing it quite certain, (and one would be most reluctant to adopt the contrary belief which some have expressed,) that this poet possessed the true devotion which many parts of his writings indicate, it may well be questioned whether their *composition* did not, at times, so occupy and swallow up his mind as to preclude or impede the direct exercises of piety. Yet who would say, that the composition of the “Night Thoughts,” (or of “The Task,”) was an injurious or unprofitable employ?

One corrective of that ill influence on spiritual comfort and improvement, which has been now described as arising from absorption of mind, or determination of thought to a particular point, will be found it is presumed, by allowing to our secret devotions that turn which most accords with the actual bent or current of the soul; or, to express it differently, by making our ruling thoughts, for the time, a guide, as far as may be, to the particular cast and topic of devotion. For, where the understanding or the imagination is strongly occu-

pied by an object, it seems more practicable to *use* this force than to expel or oppose it. Since the power of steam has been applied to navigation, it is become possible to propel a vessel directly *against* the wind and the tide ; but there is no inherent force analagous to this, (at least none is found in *some* minds,) by which the earnest course of thought strongly “setting in” towards a certain point, can be directly stemmed. What, then, is our resource, but to endeavour that the contrary current shall *indirectly* serve us ; as in the ordinary way of navigation, the vessel yields to the prevailing breeze, and has her sails filled obliquely by that very gale, which, if her prow were pointed against it, would quite baffle and stop her course.

But, it may be said, some Christians are intently engaged in pursuits no way censurable, (on which, therefore, in a general way, they can implore the divine blessing.) and yet so secular, that it appears incongruous, and even indecorous, to refer to them in their devotions. A mechanic, exercising his inventive talent on some new application of “power,” or some improved adjustment of wheels and valves ; or a chemist, as profoundly engaged in the analysis of an earth or a fluid ; or an artist, before whose “prophetic eye” the gradual idea of a fine group is mentally rising, must force himself,

it may seem, *quite* away from the immediate object of thought, if he would rightly enter on devout worship.

Yet the incongruity, or remoteness, is (in these instances at least) more seeming than real. The inquiries and operations of science and art are all linked with the laws and works of nature ;—and what are these but the presence and agency of its glorious Author? We can imagine the illustrious Boyle quite absorbed in those celebrated experiments on air, in which mechanics and chemistry were combined ; and that he, when interrupting himself in the most favourite studies of the laboratory to fulfil the solemn and beloved employments of the oratory, might conduct himself by some such gradual transition as this into the tract of devotional feeling.—Oh, Thou, by whom “all things consist,” who didst form the substance of matter, and impress on it the laws and properties of its being, Thou knowest it is my delight to investigate thy works ; whatever discoveries I may be permitted to make concerning that unseen, but wonderful fluid, on which Thou hast made animal and vegetable life, in this world, to depend, may they awaken me to deeper veneration for Thyself, the invisible Spirit, in whom, far more truly and eminently, we live, and move, and have our being !

Grant, also, that the inquiries, in which I am so pleasurablely engaged, on the subtile composition and qualities of aerial fluids, may strengthen my joyful belief, or facilitate my apprehension, of the indestructible nature of spirit, and of the promised resurrection of a spiritual body.

Nor is it more difficult to suppose the late sculptor Bacon, who was likewise eminent for the union of talent and piety, bent on the study of the great Chatham's monument, filled with the design which he was about to execute, or beginning with ardour to sketch or model it, and then retiring into his closet, not to break off suddenly and altogether from the object which had pre-occupied him ; but to say,—Oh, Thou Eternal Mind, Source of all that is wise and great, how noble are the faculties which Thou hast given to the creatures “ made in thine image, after thy likeness ;” how noble, sometimes, the expression and indication of those faculties, even in a frame so soon to be dissolved ! Thou hast endued me with the talent of feebly imitating that frame which is so “ fearfully and wonderfully made.” Thy indulgent providence has made this art an enjoyment. Bless it also, by thy grace, to my highest improvement. Help me to consider with adoration and thankfulness, while I labour to convey to lifeless materials some faint resemblance

of the character of motion and of mind, how unsearchable are thy power and skill, who givest vitality to inert matter, and dost unite intellect with the dust ! And when I remember how that commanding form, which I am about to represent in marble, now lies mouldering ; and how the spirit, which electrified the senate, is passed away ; may these thoughts inspire new gratitude for the blessed hope of the gospel ; for that sublime Visitor of earth, who “ hath made death ineffectual, and life and incorruption clear ; ”* who himself broke the prison of the tomb, and rose a living monument of his own voluntary subjection to death, and eternal triumph over the grave.

If it be said,—The employments of these excellent persons were of an intellectual kind ; but similar transitions to devout thought could not be made from the anxious affairs of commerce, or from the petty, yet perplexing routine of ordinary business ;—this must be granted ; but then, neither ought those concerns, in general, so deeply to absorb the mind, as it is the very nature of intellectual employments frequently to do.

Another corrective, however, of this mental alienation or prepossession, and more available,

* 2 Tim. i. 10. Macknight's translation and note.

perhaps, in the cases just mentioned, is to be found in the well known expedient of using (at least in a way of preparation) the pious sentiments of others. The devotional parts of scripture, and the reading or recitation of sacred poetry, have an obvious tendency to tranquillize and elevate the thoughts ; and, perhaps, the partial, or introductory adoption of forms of worship, in secret, is sometimes profitable.

There may, indeed, be a wrong and profitless use of *all* these helps ; and particularly with regard to forms of worship, it is conceivable, that some who desire to “ pray with the spirit,” may yet needlessly resort to them as a customary resource from mental effort ; yet, when the mind is in the state now described, it may be found more practicable, (and that by Christians who are quite awake to the danger of formality,) to adopt from the heart the ideas and desires of others, than to collect and express their own ; while those ideas and desires may be likewise in themselves more spiritual, more copious, more appropriate, than any which, in such circumstances, could be at once originated. If experience prove to an individual, that, by such aid, his “ heart is” sometimes more “ fixed” than without it, he, certainly, by its use, on such occasions, consults the true ends

of all worship,—his own spiritual benefit and the glory of God.

But while every expedient is commendable, that really conduces to these, it is not the less certain, that a due *regulation* of mind is of the first importance to our Religious, as well as secular interests. It will be for the happiness of all to cultivate, in every pursuit, habits of fixed attention, composedness, mental self-control ; and especially to do so in the earlier years of life, before contrary habits and tempers acquire strength.

Even idolaters have felt the peculiar impropriety of not giving the *whole* mind to sacred rites. We learn from Plutarch, that, while the Roman magistrate was employed in augury, or sacrificing, a herald admonished the people, “ *Hoc age !*” *Mind this !*—a precept, supposed by him to be derived from Pythagoras. How much stronger reason is there for us, when engaged in the “ sacrifice of praise,” or of “ a contrite spirit,” before the *living God*, to remember the more forcible precept of Paul, “ Ἐν τοῦτοις ἵσθι ; ”—In these things *BE* ;—or, “ Give thyself *wholly* to them !”*

* 1 Tim. iv. 15. An injunction, which, though primarily applied to the official engagements of the evangelist, cannot but be eminently applicable to the devotional duties of the Christian.

XVIII.

ON SPECIAL AND RECENT SIN AS FORMING AN URGENT REASON FOR CONTRITE PRAYER.

OH, that my mind were more deeply and poignantly affected at the thought of having affronted the “terrible majesty” of the universal Judge, and abused the tender forbearance of my unwearied benefactor ; at having stifled the warnings of a conscience illuminated by heavenly truth, and rebelled against a holy and forgiving God ; against Him who gave and sustains the very faculties by which I have transgressed, against Him who could instantaneously, by an agonizing correction, or a fearful judgment, teach me the omnipotence of his disregarded justice !

How melancholy and how criminal is that tendency which I discover in my heart, after the first

pains of self-accusation are past, to harden or soothe, rather than humble itself; to extenuate the offence, or to argue with a callous and perilous sophistry,—So many have been the preceding offences, that this can have added little to the account of guilt.

What deadly qualities are not united in this serpent evil, which fascinates, while it pierces the soul, and has a venom that not only corrupts, but benumbs and paralyzes also! It is true, the gospel of Christ invites and enjoins me to embrace the hope of abundant pardon: it forbids despondency after a genuine and penitential recourse to that Divine Saviour, whose “blood cleanseth from all sin;”—but how shall I rightly resort to this pardoning mercy without a true and profound contrition of spirit? Or ought even the firmest hope of forgiveness to prevent or abate undissembled humiliation and bitter self-reproach, when I reflect that all past, and present, and future good, not only to the latest instant of this life, but through the boundless ages of the life to come, must be derived to me solely from the free mercy of Him whose gracious precepts I have so lately scorned or forgotten; when I meditate on having chosen or tolerated that, on account of which, it behoved the Son of God to suffer untold anguish, from pure

love to the ruined victims of transgression ; when I acknowledge that the conduct or spirit of which I have been recently conscious, must, if unforsaken, alienate me for ever from the temper and the joys of heaven, and condemn me, by a dreadful necessity of nature, to an exile from happiness, even were I surrounded by its brightest tokens and manifestations, where the righteous “ shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father ? ” Tremble, my soul, at such a thought ! Shudder at having indulged for a day, or cherished for an hour, (or were it but for a moment,) that which, if perpetuated, were in itself “ everlasting destruction ; ” that which has in it the accursed quality and savour of the “ second death.”

When I am penetrated with this appalling truth, that a Being, “ glorious in holiness,” hath “ set my iniquities before Him, my secret sins in the light of his countenance,” that He “ understandeth my thought afar off,” and is “ acquainted with all my ways,” that he could instantly lay open the record of my multiplied offences, and proclaim them by “ the voice of an archangel in the great congregation of spirits and just men,”* that He could fill me with that “ everlasting contempt” and

* Jeremy Taylor.

incurable remorse, which must be the portion of the impenitent and unpardoned, what should be my emotion at having exposed myself to such a doom ; what fervency should inspire and pervade all my pleas for the benefits of that Saviour's atoning death, "whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God ;" and how abundantly augmented henceforth should be my love and devotedness to Him, through whom alone I can attain the peaceful hope that my "transgression is forgiven," that my "sin is covered." And surely nothing, except unfeigned penitence, evinced by importunate prayer, can justly afford me this testimony. I cannot, without the most dangerous and culpable presumption, account myself in a state of acceptance and reconciliation with God, except every known sin be followed by genuine repentance, thus heartily expressed. I can now have *no evidence*, whatever may have preceded, of being in a pardoned state, until this disposition, and this act, have been solemnly renewed. "Repentance," (says the excellent Bates) "is not an initial act of sorrow, but must be renewed all our lives. God's pardoning us is not a transient act, but continued ; as conservation is a continued creation." And if

our constant sins of imperfection and frailty make this at all times needful, then surely ought the sense of especial and peculiar guilt to constrain and stimulate us into proportionately earnest supplication. “Our desires,” (says the same author) “should be raised in the most intense degrees in some proportion to the value of the blessing ; they should be strong as our necessity to obtain it. The pardon of our sins is the effect of God’s highest favour, of that love which is peculiar to his children ; ’tis the fruit of our saviour’s bloody sufferings ; without it we are miserable for ever ; and can we expect to obtain it by a formal superficial prayer ? It deserves the flower and zeal of our affections. How solicitous, and vehement, and unsatisfied should we be, till we have the clear testimony that we are in a state of divine favour !”

And when I thus address myself to the Sovereign Source of compassion, it is indispensable to implore, not only forgiveness, but heavenly strength against the future assaults of that sin, which has “pierced me through with many sorrows ;” resuming more strenuously, (notwithstanding the sad review of their former insufficiency,) and with more deep dependence on that heavenly strength, my sacred resolutions ; entreating that the essential beauty and excellence of holiness may never more

be eclipsed by the miserable and dying illusions of evil ; that the intrinsic loathsomeness and malignity of sin may never more be cloaked or veiled from my spiritual sight, amidst the fading allurements or specious deceits with which it can here invest itself ; that I may never more yield to that wilful infatuation, which refuses to anticipate the dismal retrospects of a wounded conscience, and its yet more dismal presages ; never more may become insensible to this momentous truth, that Christian uprightness, and purity, and spirituality, can alone arm the soul against inevitable trials or prepare it for the region where a holy Saviour dwells.

XIX.

ON THE DUTY AND IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER FOR OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS.

EVEN if I possessed no other part of revealed truth than the historical books of the Old Testament, yet, giving credence and attention to these, I should find various encouragement to offer up intercession for the servants of God. The condescension of Jehovah to Abraham's repeated plea for the righteous in Sodom, was an early and impressive sanction of this practice. The many prevailing prayers of Moses for the chosen people, by which, at one time, the "wrath" of the Almighty was averted,* at another, "the fire which burnt

* Exodus xxxii. 11—14.

among them quenched,”* and, after a signal instance of murmuring and revolt, “their iniquity pardoned according to his word,”† evince its great occasional efficacy. The intense perseverance of that man of God, when, as it appears, on several occasions, he “fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights,”‡ on their behalf, shews how deep a conviction he had of the importance of earnest and continued intercession to their welfare; and the remarkable words of Samuel in a like case, “As for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you,”§ imply that this was deemed by him a regular and imperative obligation of piety.

But should I suspect (which indeed would be a mere assumption) that the office belonged, chiefly or exclusively, to the prophetic or judicial character, and that private worshippers could infer no duty or expectation from the practice or success of these eminent individuals, I cannot examine the New Testament, without finding the general duty and efficacy of such prayers distinctly established. The duty may be strongly inferred from our Saviour’s command, that his disciples should pray

* Numbers xi. 1, 2.

† Numbers xiv. 20.

‡ Deuteronomy ix. 18, 19, 25. x. 10. § 1 Samuel xii. 23.

See also Job xlii. 8—10.

even for their enemies and persecutors,* (which is enjoined as a mode of “doing them good ;”) particularly when we view this command in connexion with his own wonderful intercession on the cross. The precept is strengthened and urged by that divine example ;† and since the part of our Lord’s intercessions, which is incomparably most *difficult* to our corrupt nature, was thus designed to be imitated by his followers, and was so, in a very striking manner, by the martyr Stephen, we cannot doubt that other parts of them, which are far more easily imitable, were also intended to guide the practice of Christians. Such is the prayer for the support of Peter’s faith, mentioned to him by his gracious Master ;‡ and such the large and tender intercessions for his disciples, and for those who should believe on him through their word.§ It was in reference to an office of kindness, that our Saviour said, “I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you :”|| nor can it be conceived, that so natural a resource of friendship and sympathy would be neglected, with their heavenly Teacher’s pattern in their remembrance, and with those and his other words on record,

* Matthew v. 44. Luke vi. 28.

† Luke xxiii. 34.

‡ Luke xxii. 32.

§ John xvii.

|| John xiii. 15.

“ This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you.”

The efficacy of individual intercession is also pointedly declared in the epistle of James ; “ Pray one for another,—the inwrought prayer of a righteous man availeth much :” * and the Apostle John directs Christians to pray for a brother who hath committed sin. † But should either, or both of these injunctions be thought to relate only to the prayer of those endowed with spiritual gifts for miraculous healing, there remains in the writings of St. Paul, a store of scriptural proof, as to the general duty and efficacy of intercession for our fellow-Christians, so abundant and explicit, that if his apostolical claims be acknowledged, this conclusion cannot be evaded. Not only does he exhort to “ intercessions for all men,” ‡ but especially to “ the greatest perseverance in prayer for all the *saints*.” § He also declares, in various forms, the constancy and earnestness of his own prayers, both for Christian communities and individuals. Thus to the Roman and Ephesian churches, he writes ; —“ Without ceasing, I make mention of you

* James v. 16. Macknight’s translation. † 1 John v. 16.

‡ 1 Timothy ii. 1.

§ Ephesians vi. 18. Macknight’s Commentary.

always in my prayers ;”*—to the Corinthians, “ I thank my God always on your behalf,”† and “ I pray to God that ye do no evil ;”‡ to his friend Philemon, “ I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers ;”§ and to his convert Timothy, “ Without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.”|| In other places he states more particularly the subjects of these intercessions.¶ And it is clear that he does not regard the duty as solely or peculiarly belonging to his apostolic character, for he informs the Colossians, “ Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God ;”**—and what is still more to our purpose, he often solemnly entreats the intercession of Christians for himself and others. Thus, addressing the church at Rome ; “ I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ’s sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to

* Romans i. 9. Ephesians i. 16.

† 1 Corinthians i. 4.

‡ 2 Corinthians xiii. 7.

§ Philemon 4.

|| 2 Timothy i. 3.

¶ Philippians i. 9, 10, 11.

Colossians i. 9, 10, 11.

2 Thessalonians i. 11, 12.

** Colossians iv. 12.

God for me.”* Similar requests occur in at least four other epistles.† The apostle also distinctly attributes powerful effects to the past intercessions of his Christian friends ; for he ascribes to these (at least as a partial means) the deliverance of himself and his companions in Asia, when they had “despaired even of life ;” “you also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed on us by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf :”‡ and he expresses a similar expectation as to other events. Thus, after naming to the Philippians, a particular trial which he was enduring at Rome, he adds, “I know that this shall turn to my salvation, through *your prayer*, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”§ It appears, therefore, to have been particularly designed, that the epistles of Paul, among many other most important instructions, should specially enforce this duty, and encourage us in the persuasion of its benefits.

But have I, notwithstanding this fulness of encouragement from the Scriptures, a higher degree

* Romans xv. 30.

† 1 Thessalonians v. 25. 2 Thessalonians iii. 1, 2. Colossians iv. 3. Ephesians vi. 19.

‡ 2 Corinthians i. 8—11.

§ Philippians i. 19, and see Philemon 22.

of secret distrust as to any real good which may arise to Christian friends or communities, from my exercise of this duty, than as to the efficacy of my petitions for personal blessings? What is the source of such distrust? Is it that I suppose certain scriptural declarations to imply, that the prayers of Christians for themselves will be always sufficient to secure their real welfare, and that, therefore, intercessions for them may not be, strictly speaking, needful or beneficial? This would be imputing to the sacred writers acts and admonitions which were insincere or erroneous. If the opinion that intercession would be superfluous, could in any particular case have been allowably indulged, it might have been by these converts of St. Paul, who had witnessed his *miraculous* endowments; and by himself, who yet more surely knew that he was constituted a messenger of heaven, under a special assurance of protection and success.* But such independence of human aid would have nourished a pride and self-sufficiency, to the dangers of which the apostle was not insensible. He was made, therefore, habitually to feel, that this protection and success would be dependent on the *whole* system of means fit to be

* Acts xxvi. 17, 18.

used, both by himself and others, and that among these a principal one was the divinely instituted duty of intercession. On the same conviction the first Christians also acted, even with respect to the chief apostles. From the unceasing prayer of the church at Jerusalem, for the release of Peter,* (who, in the same city, had proved his divine commission by so many miracles,†) and from the prayers of the Corinthians, to which Paul refers, as having contributed to his own rescue from impending death, we learn that no eminence, personal or official, in the objects of their pious regard, made them imagine intercession on their behalf to be needless. Much less ought we to doubt its importance and value in respect to ordinary Christians, however superior we may account them to ourselves, or whatever certainty we may feel of their genuine devotedness. St. Paul expresses an entire assurance of the final perseverance and perfection of his Philippian converts:‡ but almost in the next sentence he offers a prayer for their growth and stability in various graces.§ And with our intimate sense of the defects and inequalities of our own prayers, and our observation of the numerous imperfections and severe trials of other Christians,—have we not

* Acts xii. 5.

† Acts iii. 7. v. 15.

‡ Phillippians i. 6.

§ *Ibid.* i. 9, 10, 11.

every reason both to desire the intercessions of our brethren, to conclude that they may justly desire a part even in ours, and to believe that these reciprocal exercises of faith and love, are, through the sovereign and wise appointment of our heavenly Father, mutually needful, and will, through his mercy, be mutually availing? The fact that many intercessions may conduce to the perseverance and perfection of the believer, is analagous to this very familiar fact, that various causes, seen or unseen, are often made to conduce to success in any secular design. When a person aims at some honourable office, his own diligent preparations, and perhaps solicitations, are indispensable; but still a few unsolicited words, uttered in his favour by real friends, may just fill up that measure of influence, on others or on himself, which is requisite to the fulfilment of his hopes. And as in other cases, so particularly in reference to spiritual interests and attainments, we can discern (as was hinted before) some weighty reasons for this appointment. If our sense of the need and value of mutual help be one great bond of *civil* society, yet more is it adapted to be a bond of *Christian* society, for it promotes those tempers which are distinctive of the Christian character,—humility and love. If I believe, with St. Paul, respecting my fellow-Christians, that all things

shall turn to my salvation “through *their* prayer,” in conjunction with my own, then I have not only to be grateful for the *fountain* of “living water,” “the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ,” but for the various channels, known and unknown, through which it is partially derived and conveyed. The lowliest Christian whom I have sought to benefit, or possibly whom I have overlooked and neglected, may be the instrument of averting from me an evil, or procuring to me a good, the extent of which neither can in this world calculate. Such a belief cannot but promote both “lowliness of mind,” and a sentiment of affection towards all whom I may believe to fulfil sincerely this office of pious friendship ; for every such person, however unable in other respects to aid me, thus assumes the capacity of a real benefactor. And this kind of obligation, from whatever quarter it be incurred, is not, like many others, felt to be a burden. We know that they who affectionately offer prayers for us, enlarge and satisfy their hearts, while in this benefaction, they present nothing with their hands. We hope, also, that we can return for these expressions of their love, intercessions not less genuine ; and besides this, there is no doubt, that many a devout and grateful heart has felt itself relieved from the oppressive sense of *other* bounties, when,

having nought else to render, it has poured forth in secret its best desires and petitions for their dispenser, to their Divine Author. I have been told, that a Christian, distinguished by his large pecuniary beneficence,* strictly enjoined his almoners to prevent the objects of it from thanking him, either personally or by letter, for his ample gifts. He justly alleged the multiplied claims on his time as a reason for this prohibition, and probably the knowledge of his own heart suggested another secret reason of equal force. But the restriction was so painful to some grateful receivers of his bounty, as to be submitted to with the utmost reluctance. We can well conceive a pious beneficiary who was compelled to this unwilling silence, taking refuge from that constraint with greater earnestness in the devotions of the closet; and the feelings of a full heart, like waters forcibly compressed, rising the more suddenly and strongly to heaven, because debarred from their natural course on earth. We can imagine such an individual entering on fervent intercessions for that munificent friend with sentiments like these;—You have forbidden every expression of my gratitude to yourself, and I feel this deeply as a hardship; but you cannot prohibit

* The late Mr. Henry Thornton.

or impede what I trust will be a more effectual, as well as more unequivocal testimony of it, those solemn and affectionate supplications for your eternal gain, which, I humbly hope, will be known by their fruits in the great day of account.

Love is cherished in the mind, not only by the belief that others will benefit *us*, but also by the belief that we can reciprocally procure real good to *them*. Simply to *think* of a friend with affection, is a very inefficient, and sometimes, a melancholy employ; but if I can perform a real kindness towards him, however secretly, I do that which is pleasurable in itself, and tends, by bringing him often into my thoughts as an object of regard, to unite me more and more with him in heart. If you can carry to a sufferer food or medicine, or advice or consolation, you will probably visit him frequently, and your concern for him will increase. If you could bestow nothing but a look of grief, which you know would be fruitless, you would be likely to turn aside from his door. So he who really believes that he can substantially benefit his Christian friends by prayer on their behalf, will often bring their characters and circumstances in review before his mind, and by every such mental act, will strengthen the habit of sympathizing affection. And while the prac-

tice tends to promote humility and love on earth, the retrospect of it may have the same effect, more eminently, in a future state of social blessedness. How delightfully endearing, in that perfect state, for the circles of pious friendship, and those intimately connected here in Christian communion, fully to feel and know that the eventual happiness of each is to be traced in part, instrumentally, to the intercession of all ; so that, in heaven as well as on earth, “for the gift bestowed by the means of many,” even the precious gift of augmented felicity, “thanks may be given by many,” to God and to each other, on behalf of their associates and themselves. May we not suppose, that the most near and tender friendships of the heavenly world, will subsist between those whose prayers have been most earnest and most prevalent for each other, while they sojourned here ?

And if we can thus perceive a present improvement of the most valuable graces, and a future augmentation of pure and never-ending enjoyments, to be the natural results of this divine institute, truly here is enough to repress and to rebuke every doubt regarding its importance.

But perhaps my misgiving as to the efficacy of my ordinary intercessions, arises from this,—that I cannot habitually intercede in a copious or dis-

tinct manner, even for my nearer circle of Christian friends, still less in proportion as the connexion is more remote. In the latter cases, my petitions are, of necessity, quite general, and as to the former, if I include, in my daily prayers, all, or most, of those who have some special claim on my remembrance, want of time must prevent these intercessions from being specific or enlarged.

On this it may be observed, that we cannot suppose a devout Christian will often omit daily intercession, though it be necessarily brief, for the few who are *most* near and dear. But with respect to other friends, it seems most natural and expedient, that our prayers should be but occasional, in order that they may then be more prolonged. There are very few, even of our best friends, whom we can visit daily. How happy would some be if they could meet even yearly. But if we made it a rule of piety and kindness, daily to offer up particular intercession for *one* individual, or *one* household, and thus successively for each, these secret visits of the heart would, in many instances, be far more frequent than our personal or epistolary intercourse can be. Amidst the inclemency of winter, or in the chamber of sickness, we might still make the swift excursions, and offer the best though unheard salutations, of Christian affection:—those

friends of course claiming precedence in our thoughts, whose feelings or circumstances were known to demand at the time peculiar sympathy or interest.

In cases, however, where brevity is necessary, the mistrust which may arise from it is an illusion. No number or variety of words can constitute the essence or effectiveness of prayer, as viewed by the Divine Mind. If, indeed, our prayers for *ourselves* were needlessly brief, scanty, and general, this would indicate an absence of desire; a want of sensibility to our own particular sins and defects; an undue preference for other engagements; and a distaste for converse with our Supreme Benefactor. Besides, the attainment of pardon, renovation, and final perfection, is our great *personal* concern. It were unreasonable and impracticable, in this as in other affairs, that men should ordinarily give as much time to the concerns of various friends, severally, as to their own. But the brevity of prayers, even for *personal* blessings, when they are offered amidst really urgent occupation, or under sudden temptation, cannot be supposed to render them less effectual, than as if, in other circumstances, our emotions and wants had been ever so copiously developed. Those affecting and sublime words of our Lord, “Father, save me from

this hour ;”—“ Father, glorify thy name ;”—if we may venture reverently to appropriate them in the crisis of danger or distress, will surely, at such a moment, express as much before God, as if our need of succour could be fully unfolded, or our submission largely declared.

And thus the necessary brevity of many of our *intercessions*, provided there be in them the real sentiment of Christian love, cannot be deemed to lessen their efficacy. It is this sentiment of “ fervent charity,” in which we so much need to “ abound more and more,” that would give to our briefest and most general intercessions a new vitality and power. It was this which melted and shed abroad, in a thousand glowing currents, (if one may speak so,) the heart of the converted Paul ; so that “ the whole world,” as Fenelon observes, “ was too narrow for this heart :” and Chrysostom finely remarks on the affection expressed by that apostle for the church at Philippi ;* “ It was much ‘ to have them in his heart,’ but much more when in chains ; yet more when engaged ‘ in the defence and confirmation of the gospel ;’ for he seems to refer to the time when he was brought before his judges, and underwent the extremity of peril.

* Philippians i. 7.

Even standing *there*, (he seems to say,) I meditated not how I should be rescued from imminent dangers, or how escape the snares of conspiracy, but I was delighting in your love, and in converse with the absent; not length of distance, nor the crowd of cares, nor the magnitude of perils; not the fear of rulers, nor the insurrection of multitudes; not death impending, not naked swords, not the array of executioners, nor any other object, could sever me from the remembrance of *you*.—For nothing is more imperious, nothing more sublime than love; it flies above all such weapons; it is loftier than the darts of the great adversary; from the topmost heaven it looks downward on them all, and as the vehemence of a mighty wind sweeps away the oppressive dust, so the force of love sweeps away the turmoil of all other passions. Thus it was with Paul. In all events, he had sufficient consolation, the salvation and the remembrance of those whom he loved.”*

* Chrysos. Hom. iv. Selectæ à Matthæi. Hom. 2, p. 84. The original passage has a force and harmony of diction, which I have found no means of transfusing into a version.

XX.

ON ENDEAVOURING, AMIDST DEJECTION, TO
“LOOK AT THE THINGS WHICH ARE UNSEEN.”

ALL earthly things appear to thee more dark and cheerless than the clouds of this autumn day. But why not, by an effort of contemplation, and by the grace of faith, enter into other scenes, and rise to glorious and unchangeable realities? Knowest thou not that all the disappointments and disgusts of this life will, ere long, be as if they had never been; and has not the word of God assured thee of a mansion, nay, of “*many* mansions,” where all is grandeur, and serenity, and love?

A prisoner confined in the darkest cell, or an artisan wearied with the most irksome sameness of employ, may transport himself, in thought, to the charms of the fairest landscape, or to dwellings of

ease and social pleasure ; and although his despondency may be, in some cases, justly deepened, by a well-grounded fear that these enjoyments will never become his, thou, that art about to worship the “ Father of mercies,” by that “ new and living way,” which Christ “ hath consecrated for us,” art surely not authorized to cherish the same gloomy apprehension with regard to things eternal.

The sacred intercourse with heaven, in which thou art preparing to engage, implies, if it be sincere, a true *desire* of celestial good, and of that holiness which qualifies for its possession. And will such a desire be disregarded or frustrated by “ *the God of all grace?*” The Divine Teacher and Saviour hath solemnly proclaimed, “ Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they *shall be filled.*”

Seek then to realize, even as at this *moment* subsisting in all its glory, a world of perfect purity and joy ; think of the full displays of the divine excellency, which there imbue with unmingled delight every adoring inhabitant. Try to conceive that inexpressible peace, combined with an unspeakable energy and ardour of love, which a present God can infuse, and is at this very hour infusing, into happy spirits that encircle his throne. Even at this point of time, while thou art depressed

by saddening thoughts, and the heavy rain-drops only remind thee of the gloom of external nature, there is a joyful assembly raising the ceaseless anthem of praise, which fills with rapture every being that unites in it. No petty cares, no painful regrets, no distractions of thought, no infirmities of the body or the mind, impede that consentaneous flow of love and ecstasy. Every spirit is absorbed in blissful emotion, incapable of satiety, in deep sympathy with the rest, yet supremely fixed on the great original of all their joy. If it were not for space interposed, or perhaps only mortal weakness forbidding, an enrapturing view of the felicity which God imparts to unfallen or restored creatures, might this moment burst upon thee. These particles of light which have just reached thine eye, come tinged with a sort of congenial sadness as they gleam between wintry clouds ; yet, only eight minutes since, (the calculations of science assure us,) did these very particles issue from the glowing sun, the spring of warmth and radiance. Were it ordained that one or more of them should become the organs of thy disembodied being, and by a reverted flight, not swifter than their journey hither, should bear thee to the orb whence they emanated, fewer moments than thou hast now occupied in one low circle of anxious thought, would

suffice to carry thee into the very focus of our heaven's effulgence. The harp of Uriel, or the full harmony of the spheres, might, long before that, enchant thy new and finer sense ; the glorious companies of the happy might visibly surround thee with smiles of gratulation : the cares and dark imaginings of this little scene would have died into remoteness, and perhaps oblivion. Or possibly, not even any change of place were needful to this change of scene. There might need but the fall of the grosser frame, the dissolving of this "tabernacle," to reveal a world of blissful existence even *here* ; as the mountain in Dothan, when God opened the eyes of the prophet's desponding servant, "was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

But whatever be the fact (as to nearness or remoteness) with regard to *created* glories, the *Lord* of glory is ever with thee. He who gives being and perpetuity to all those unseen joys is *here*. "Do I not fill heaven and earth, saith the Lord?" Wilt thou then approach, as a worshipper, this God of glory, with a dull and unmoved heart? After one glance at what is now existing and transacting in some other region (perhaps even in *this* region) of his works, wilt thou be faint and feeble-minded to implore his Holy Spirit, the earnest of

a participation in his own felicity ? Has not “ the God of all patience and comfort,” by the lips of his beloved Son, most emphatically promised to them that ask him, this divine gift, this inestimable pledge ? Is it a gift to be sought coldly, or entreated carelessly ?—even the sovereign blessing of Him that has all the springs of joy ?

Surely the indifference or distaste which is now experienced by thee with regard to the ordinary comforts and occupations of this life, will not be allowed to extend to those heavenly hopes which are essentially and everlastingly worthy of thy warmest pursuit ; to that state where there will be an eternal plenitude of spiritual delights, adequate to the satisfaction of immortal desires, and where these hallowed desires can themselves never languish or decline. Awake, O candidate for an incorruptible crown ; address thyself to “ the Father of lights,” as if some ray from the glory and beauty of his heavenly temple were poured upon thine inward vision ; as if some faint echo of the hallelujahs of the perfect had visited thine ear !

XXI.

ON THE DUTY OF REMEMBERING, IN A SIN-
FUL OR INSENSIBLE TEMPER OF MIND, HOW
THE ALMIGHTY CAN CORRECT.

THE thought of our own death, and of the life which follows, when impressively presented, and deeply received into the mind, is a thought of unequalled power. But it is not the *only* thought which can revive, by a salutary dread, our impaired sense of that awful truth, “the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.” There are possibilities and probabilities, which, by their number, their variety, and their apprehended nearness in point of time, may affect me more than the foresight of that last event, which, though inevitably certain, is generally conceived of as distant.

Now that my mind is, in a great measure, insusceptive of the truth or awfulness of God’s moral

government, and the infinite importance of his favour, I should endeavour to call up the reflection how entire is my dependence, and in how many ways I am vulnerable. When the great poet of mythology represents “the Lord of the unerring bow,” as bending it against the Grecian hosts, and discharging arrows “bright with an immortal’s vengeance,”* he does but use the same figure (though with a peculiar and beautiful appropriation of it to the destructive sunbeams) which the poets of the true theology had before applied to the visitations, whether visible, or invisible, of a power really divine. Job had exclaimed, “The arrows of the Almighty are within me !” David, though not less brave than the Argive warriors, had cried out in anguish, “Thine arrows stick fast in me !” And what figure can more truly, as well as forcibly, represent our exposed condition here, than that which the former of those sacred writers pursues, when he says, God hath “set me up for his mark : his archers compass me round about ;”—the condition of one who is open to the flying points of unnumbered arrows ? How silently, how secretly, may the darts of bodily or mental suffering reach

* See note F, at the end of the volume.

me ! The shaft of death may strike suddenly and in succession those that are dearest, till I am ready to adopt that mournful expostulation, “ Insatiate archer, could not *one* suffice ? ” The viewless dart of pain may touch a minute vessel or a minuter nerve, and all earthly comfort be suspended, while that hidden wound is unhealed. Or what is still more keen, and often less curable, the barb sharpened by calumny or unkindness, by the misconduct or calamities of another, or by spiritual dejection and terror, may “ enter into my soul.” Of all these kinds, (and how innumerable the individual varieties of each,) are the weapons of the just and holy God, “ the arrows of his quiver.” They are sometimes the missiles of an instant, more rapid than the darting beams that glanced pestilence on the dying Greeks. Would not the actual pang but from *one* of these, at once painfully awaken me to my need of divine help and healing ? And can I doubt, that, amidst my numberless provocations, on *me* also he hath, as it were, “ bent his bow and made it ready ! ” Yet how seldom has ‘ the arrow flown : And how frequently has it come like an arrow spent or blunted, which might have had a tenfold force or keenness, but for the forbearance or gentleness of that mighty arm which directed it ?

What multiplied occasions have I had to acknowledge,—“He maketh sore and bindeth up;—He woundeth, and his hands make whole!”

Nor ought I to consider these arrows of the Almighty, even when their wound has been the deepest, and when it rankles still, as sent, like those of the fabled Divinity, in vengeance. Never can this be supposed, except when they are commissioned against the utterly hardened and incorrigible. What can be more agonizing than those wounds both of the body and the spirit, which Job describes?—“He cleaveth my reins asunder, and doth not spare; He poureth out my gall upon the ground.” And yet it is most manifest that these were the “faithful wounds” of a heavenly “Friend.” He who “corrects in measure,” may have “bent his bow *like* an enemy;” indeed, He says *more* than this by the prophet to his servant Israel: “I have *wounded* thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a *cruel* one; which incontrovertibly shews how “grievous,” how apparently “incurable” may be the pang that is yet inflicted in mercy. For what is the sequel? “I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord.” Finding in the Scripture such facts and such assurances, I should wrong and affront the divine perfection, by

imagining that present chastisement, even when it is the immediate effect of sin, is inflicted for any other than a restoring purpose. It were comparing the righteous and merciful God to the most evil and merciless of men, to account his arrows envenomed. Rather let me believe that the sharpest are dipped in balm. It is true, the patriarch, in the impassioned language of suffering, says, "The poison whereof drinketh up my spirit;" but the poison originates and ferments only in the disordered frame which they pierce. Even when revengeful men and malignant spirits are employed as the "archers" of him who corrects man for iniquity, still he has all power and grace to make their enmity subservient to the purposes of his own loving-kindness.

But while this consolatory caution with regard to the gracious designs of Him who is all-powerful, cannot be too deeply impressed on me, let me not forget the situation in which I really am while on earth, and which the scriptural metaphor so aptly expresses. Still, even to the end of my course, I shall be like a pilgrim "in the wilderness of Paran," among the predatory tribes of Ishmael, "a mark for his archers." The next moment can wing an unseen arrow, and fix a smart which no human skill may avert or mitigate, or perhaps discern. I

see continually the effects of these darts on some around me ; but there is a far greater multitude which are unobserved, and many where the wound is as latent as the weapon's flight.—Not that this exposed state of pilgrimage should occasion dismay. The soldiers of a wretched ambition, even defenceless as they are in modern warfare, have exhibited astonishing intrepidity and calmness in the thickest perils of battle ; a temper of mind which denotes insane presumption, when we consider the cause in which they have been engaged, and the flagrant contempt of God's power and law which their lives have often evinced. But he who venerates that ever-present power, has all *reason* for courage and confidence. Our God at once directs the assailants, and provides the defence of his servants. Though “his troops come together, and raise up their way against me, and encamp round about my tent ;”—“the angel of the Lord encampeth (more closely) round about them that fear him ;” not indeed to ward off every assault, or avert every weapon, but to afford such aids as the all-wise and gracious Ruler has himself appointed.

Yet nothing can be more apparent than that a remiss, unwatchful, and, if I may so term it, *un-*

*cinctured** frame of spirit, is entirely unsuited to a state in which pains and perils continually impend ; that indulgence in what is wrong, or neglect of what is right, gives actual cause for these chastisements ; that when they are inflicted, conscience, except it be seared or stupefied, will interpret them as penalties, and sometimes with the dread that they are merely judicial, not corrective ; an apprehension which, though it be erroneous, yet, while it continues, awfully enhances their severity. Besides that, many of the ills of life *are* express and special penalties, (though of the merciful and corrective kind,) no believer of the Scriptures can doubt. God himself says, “ I have wounded thee—for the multitude of thine iniquity, because thy sins were increased.” Even if I could always maintain the alleviating persuasion that punishment is designed in mercy, this does not wholly change its nature as punishment ; still less does it therefore cease to be “ for the present—*grievous*.” Though the arrow be commissioned to do the healing office of the lancet, I can scarcely expect to feel assured of this when it pierces me ; but if I *should*, it may yet be clear that I have brought on myself the

* Peter i. 13.

disease which calls for so sharp a remedy ; nor may the wound in itself be less deep, nor the pain less acute, than as if it had come from an *enemy's* quiver. Am I then slumbering when I should press onward ? Have I not to expect, continuing in this position, to be speedily roused by some quickening dart ? Am I loitering, while the sun of life declines, or have I diverged into some path “ the ends whereof are the ways of death ? ” May I not then, with certainty, conclude that He whose “ eyes are upon the ways of man,” who “ marketh all my paths,” has even now “ made ready his arrow upon the string,” and that if I persevere, I shall not return without a bleeding heart or a wounded spirit ? Unless love to God (that pure and delightful motive to vigilance against all sin, and zeal in every duty) were perfected in me, I cannot but need the harsh checks and incentives of fear : and if I fail to contemplate feelingly the more awful, but more distant objects of that passion, it behoves me to reflect on those which are at hand ; the terrors or sufferings which, if God will, “ shall make me afraid on every side.” Have I endured “ corporal sufferance ” and mental anguish in time past ? Do I remember, if not the nature and degree, yet the effects of each, so as thus to compute, in some measure, what was their intense-

ness? Do not I know to what an excruciating extremity these might be raised by Him who sustains my very existence? Am I not well aware that the same power who “redeemeth my life from destruction,” can cause me, before another sun shall rise, to “water my couch with my tears?” What stronger or more immediate temporal motive for thanksgiving, than the present undeserved forbearance of God? What more pressing argument than these “innumerable evils” to which I am obnoxious, to excite constant and earnest prayer for his holy keeping, and unrelaxing watchfulness against those transgressions and neglects which, doubtless, are often the direct cause of suffering, and which always form its bitterest aggravation?

XXII.

ON THAT DISCOURAGEMENT IN PRAYER WHICH ARISES FROM THE WANT OF SENSIBLE FER- VOUR AND JOY.

THE remarkable opinion of Fenelon, “we never pray so purely, as when we are tempted to believe that we are no longer really praying, because we cease to taste a certain pleasure in prayer,”* is adapted to afford to some minds a most valuable encouragement, provided they be convinced that it is grounded on truth, and may be received with safety. But the very state of mind to which it applies, is that in which we are prone to view all encouragement with suspicion.

Here, indeed, it may be right to premise, (in order to preclude any perversion of the sentiments

* Œuv. Spir. Tom i. pp. 113 and 119.

which follow,) that there *is* a kind of suspicion, which it is a Christian's duty ever to investigate. The want of enjoyment in devotion may doubtless be often traced to the indulgence of some sin. It should, therefore, lead us the more seriously to faithful self-examination, extending to the allowed state of the thoughts and affections ; and should induce redoubled watchfulness against all that is evil, as a canker at the root of spiritual joy.—On the other hand, it would be most unwarrantable to affirm, that Fenelon, so distinguished for a self-scrutinizing and self-denying piety, was grossly deceived as to the state of his own heart ; it would be presumptuous to suppose that the Father of our spirits cannot, or must not, try his servants by spiritual privations, as well as in any other manner, without peculiar provocation on their part ; and it would be cruel, as well as presumptuous, to decide for the individual who mourns under such destitution, that it necessarily flows from his own sins, (otherwise than as *all* sufferings originally spring from that source,) or is absolutely removable by his own efforts.

It is undeniable that perseverance in a duty when unattended with pleasure, is a stronger test of principle, than the most ample indulgence in a privilege which proves its own immediate reward.

But while we must admit that *some* principle is evinced, we are apt to inquire, (under that painful privation of devotional enjoyment), Is it the principle of *faith* by which I am actuated, or is it a mere effort of conscience, which, to appease its fears, attempts to counterfeit a sacred engagement? Can we be said to exercise real faith, except our prayer be not by self “constraint, but willingly;” and unless, in the course of it, we attain some joyful or pleasing views of the divine perfections and promises?—I apprehend we may; and even that a much *stronger* exercise of faith may be inferred from our “continuing instant” in stated prayer, while such views are not imparted, than from the greatest copiousness of devotion, amidst the fervour of elevated and hopeful feeling.

It was indeed elsewhere observed, that the lively *joyful* exercise of faith is an exercise not only of belief, but of imagination;* (or vivid conception;) but it is far from following as a just consequence, that faith, without this cheering auxiliary, cannot be genuine, steadfast, or tenacious. We are accustomed to speak of the *light* or the *eye* of faith; by which we mean belief combined with that powerful conception of its objects which is highly

* XI. page 96.

gratifying, and doubtless, sometimes, highly profitable, to the mind possessing it; but the devout and eloquent author, whom I have quoted, often speaks of the “darkness,” the “profound night of pure faith,” by which he means a mere belief, divested of those accessory aids of imagination and sentiment. And it is manifest, that such a mere belief if it prompt to supplication and to action, attests its own strength far more clearly, than that which is reinforced and sustained by pleasurable emotions. It may indeed have much more of *doubt* to contend with; for suspended *apprehension*, regarding spiritual or unseen objects, is (as was remarked in another place*) very much allied to doubt; but then the continued life, and action, and conflict of faith, *amidst* such doubt, give powerful proof of its reality and force.

We can imagine two seamen navigating the opposite extremities of the same broad ocean.—On one, the sun has genially risen, and cheers his heart as it scatters brightness over the rippling waves. A favourable gale springs up. He is bid weigh anchor and hoist all sail. He obeys with alacrity and delight. There is no sense of fatigue or reluctance; with every strain of the cable his

* XIV. page 124.

heart bounds homeward: he seems to descry already the cliffs of his native shore, and his loud cheers keep time with his animated efforts.—On the other, the dew of night is falling, or the sharp blast whistles round him. Every star is hidden. The vessel makes no way. Nothing can be seen, and he hears only the gloomy dash of the billow. He is directed to ascend the mast, to reef a sail, to labour at the pump. He steadily obeys: but it is in sadness. His heart is heavy, and his eye dull. No lively anticipation of the desired haven visits his mind. No note of animation or pleasure is heard. Still he continues instant in toil. Will it be said that this man shews no genuine trust and fidelity? Rather, surely, that the principle of faith or confidence in the master of the vessel is much more decisively proved and exhibited in his situation, than in that of the first named.

Discouragement of the kind now referred to, may further be alleviated by some other considerations. If it were the fact that prayer cannot be true or effectual, unless attended with some degree of pleasurable excitement, then, as it would be strictly what I have termed—indulgence in a privilege, there could be little or no place for our Lord's injunction, “that men ought always to pray, and *not to faint* ;” or for the parallel admonition of

St. Paul respecting it, that believers should “watch thereunto with all perseverance.” In an employment which was always gratifying, there could be little danger of our fainting, except, indeed, from the exhausting action of continued pleasure on our present feeble faculties : and it was obviously not to *such* fainting that our Saviour referred, but to that which arises from weariness in an arduous pursuit, when not immediately or speedily requited. If prayer were habitually a highly pleasing occupation, instead of having to watch thereunto with all perseverance, we must employ a strenuous self-denial in reverting from it to the ordinary duties of life.

Some contemplative and fervid minds have actually had to practise this self-denial in turning from the pleasures of devotion, even to the labours by which they were spiritually to benefit others, and much more to those secular engagements whose utility they deemed quite inferior. Such was *their* kind of trial : and a most enviable kind of trial it appears ; inasmuch as the very *temptations* of such persons have been towards the highest good, and their very tendencies to error have contained the proof of their spirituality.

Our trials may be of an opposite and humiliating character ; but it is a lesson which, in the

school of Christ, we are often early and impressively taught, and may need to be taught yet more, that we are not to be the *choosers* of our discipline ; that we are not to select the class in which we will be placed, or the tasks we will attempt, or the mode of their inculcation, or the sort of correction we will endure.

If we were indulged in this selection, who doubts that we should decline all chastisement but what was almost nominal, all tasks but what were brief and easy, and involving in them some portion of excitement and self-applause ? By a half unconscious artifice, we should allot to ourselves those penalties, and those performances, which, while they might prove grievous or difficult to some others, would be comparatively light to *us*, and at the same time would foster self-complacency. Our self-imposed crosses would be, like those made of *amber* by the Romanists in Sicily, of the lightest material that could gratify pride.

But in all this there would be nothing to promote the spirit which befits all creatures, and, most of all, apostate creatures ; the spirit of unreserved, undissembled submission to the just sovereignty of God.

Let me then, in spiritual, as well as in temporal things, seek that temper which knows “ how

to be abased," as well as "how to abound." Let me persevere in prayer, "watching thereunto," from pure confidence in the Author of Good ; from mere faith in his perfections, though not feelingly discerned ; from a desire of that final blessedness which will glorify Him, without impatience even for the smallest portion of that present joy, which might "exalt me above measure."—Nor is it, perhaps, sufficiently considered by susceptible minds, *how* small a portion of heavenly joy, awakened by a disclosure of divine favour and approaching bliss, might produce mental alienation or bodily disease.

But we may be, sometimes, tempted to argue,—Destitute as I am of lively enjoyment in devotion, where is my pledge or token of preparedness for the sacred pleasures of heaven? Is there not rather a fearful intimation of my spirit being unattuned for the employments of that blissful society? Rather let us admit,—Perseverance in pious exercises, under continued humiliation and discouragement, should be accepted as a proof, that a divine hand upholds my steps, though it scatters no flowers on my path ; that it gives strength, though not buoyancy ; that a sacred influence prompts my desires, though it does not sensibly gratify them. If we saw a youth, in hours

of full health and vivacity, and under some peculiar stimulus from circumstances, applying himself to a scientific research with ardour and delight, we might predict,—He will distinguish himself at college: and he too might secretly join in the prediction with a sanguine self-congratulating spirit; but if we saw him under languor and discouragement, forcing himself to pursue his object, from a conviction of its excellence, although with very little vigour, and with no sense of pleasure, we should not infer, from the absence of these, an unpreparedness, in other circumstances, to excel and to enjoy. We should rather say,—Here is a principle which nothing can wholly subvert, a taste so deeply implanted, that nothing can eradicate it. Here is vegetation under the snow; shall we despair that the grain will ripen in autumn?

Some Christians may, perhaps, best account for this severe kind of inward trial, by considering more practically the express scriptural assurances, that real chastisement is the needful portion of the sons of God. This needful portion must be, in *some* way, effectually dispensed. In several ages of the church, it has been externally and conspicuously great and severe. But in the present age, there are a vast majority, to whom it has not been dispensed, as of old, in the form of persecution,

in fines, or bonds, or scourges, or cruel mockings ; many who have not encountered it in the opposition of friends, or the malice of foes ; many, likewise, who have not endured poverty or open reproach, nor suffered the most aggravated of relative afflictions. But where the external dispensations of Providence are thus comparatively indulgent, were there no internal pains to balance the account, the Christian would pass through his state of pupillage without any decisive experience of that chastisement, “whereof (an apostle declares) all are partakers.”* And since he plainly adds, that our spiritual adoption would be disproved by its absence, how just the fears to which such an exemption might give rise. We may be grateful, therefore, (amidst secret privations and pains,) if our Heavenly Father employ those hidden resources “to humble us and to prove us,” that so we need not question our filial relation to him, on account of being screened from a “great fight of” external “affliction.”—Will it, however, still be said, Why, since these resources of paternal chastisement are boundless, why this *particular* trial, this destitution of enjoyment in his own service ? The question still proceeds on a presumed ability and right

* Hebrews xii. 8.

to *choose*; and yet, if other modes of inward trial were offered, which would we accept? Would we be assailed by sudden and excruciating temptation? Would we exchange our present privations for the actual infliction of the acutest bodily pain, or for that horror of spirit with which some devout minds have been overwhelmed?

But if those trials, as being perhaps more temporary, would be really less difficult to bear, may not that be precisely the reason why *this* trial has in wisdom and mercy been assigned us? What is it we prize and desire the most? Is it spiritual joy? Is it tenderness and complacency in devotion? Is it the sense of God's gracious presence? Here then is the point at which the self-renunciation demanded in the gospel is thoroughly put to the proof. We are to trust God with our all; with the best and noblest enjoyments, as well as those which are inferior. This is the ultimate test. He can prolong our deprivations as he sees good; but He can, also, at any moment, terminate them, imparting "manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."

XXIII.

ON THE MEANS OF MAINTAINING A DEVOTIONAL HABIT AND SPIRIT IN A LIFE OF BUSINESS.

A LIFE of business, taking the term in its largest sense, is a more usual kind of life than some persons imagine. The great majority of men are actively engaged in secular pursuits, and obviously cannot command any large share of time for retirement. The multitude labour with their hands; and the middle classes, either in a lighter sort of labours, or in superintending those of others, have more exercise of mind, with sometimes not much less fatigue of body. In the higher departments of commerce, and still more in the employments called professional, this mental application is often unremitted and arduous; and even there it is frequently combined with much bodily exer-

tion. Nor can he have seen much of society, or reflected much on its constitution, who supposes that in the sphere where acquisition of property ceases to be the object of industry, there is no such thing as a life of business, properly so called. The contrary is most apparent with respect to stations of public service, such as those of the British legislator and magistrate ; and of Christians who dedicate themselves, with a far higher aim than temporal emolument, to the ministry of religion.

But, not to speak of these situations, even a life called private may be a life of business, by the diversity of engagements which it rightly and in great part necessarily includes. Even the prudent management of that property which confers leisure, when it is not large enough for this to be chiefly deputed, requires frequent personal attention ; and, where so deputed, the extent of affairs that renders this aid expedient, will include many which cannot be wholly devolved on others, but where the principal's time is also claimed. Besides this, many undefined and occasional occupations, which cannot well be avoided, though it would be difficult to class or enumerate them, form items in every one's expenditure of minutes.

An ingenious French writer has constructed a systematic register for noting with great brevity the

several employments of time ;* and the classes of occupation to which separate columns are there assigned, even omitting those which are quite optional, and those in which a devotional person is not likely to engage, will shew that even in private life, or what is termed a life of leisure, each twenty-four hours must usually be divided into not a few sections, “ Sleep” and “repasts” cannot be excluded, though they might sometimes be abridged; while “bodily exercises” ought in many instances to be prolonged; “religious exercises” are the object of our present remarks; “domestic relations,” “affairs of economy and order,” cannot with justice or comfort be neglected; “reading,” “correspondence,” “society,” have more or less their several claims. We may add, that the characteristics of the present age, particularly the habit of an increased mental culture, and the many institutions for promoting the good of the community, present such demands on the time of the less occupied, that a man of leisure, except secluded in point of residence, must resolutely shun what appear to be just claims for attention and exertion, in order not to lead something very like a life of business.

* M. Julien. *Mémorial Horaire*.

Nor does this apply exclusively to our own sex. Though it will not be attempted to detail the engagements of the other, observation assures us, that without being either frivolous or inappropriate, they may often be sufficiently numerous and engrossing, to constitute, if not a life of business, yet certainly a busy life.

All this the progress of wealth and knowledge has promoted. In the ruder state of society, toil is chiefly bodily, and, where not urged by an oppressor, has its considerable intervals of passive inaction. Civilization renders daily life, to a numerous class, less laborious, but more entirely occupied. Especially it augments, for many, the toils of the mind; and even where these are not professed, and stated, and obligatory, it yet multiplies our mental occupations and cares. Nor do we question the good tendency of this; for it has been truly said, "man is born for action, as the fire tends upward, and the stone descends. Not to be occupied and not to exist is for man the same thing."* Dr. Isaac Barrow treats with severe contempt "the passable" (popular) "notion, what is a gentleman but his pleasure?"—"If this be true," (he observes,) "if a gentleman be nothing else but

* Condorcet, quoted by Julien.

this, then truly he is a sad piece, the most considerable, the most despicable, the most pitiable and wretched creature in the world.”—“But” (he adds) “in truth it is far otherwise: to suppose that a gentleman is loose from business is a great mistake; for indeed no man hath more to do, no man lieth under greater obligations to industry than he.”*

Yet multiplicity or abundance of occupation, whether it be imposed on us by circumstances, or voluntarily engaged in, will be attended with evil, if it prevent the right performance of any important duty; if, from over-pressure, or dissipation, or exhaustion of mind, we have not calmness, or elasticity, or strength, for what is incumbent on us. Different minds are qualified to bear, and even require, in order to their complete action, different measures of labour and responsibility; as certain machines require to be regulated, some by appending a less and some a greater weight. Among the hazards incident to much and diverse occupation, one of the greatest in the Christian’s view will be that of its impairing the spirit of devotion. One is however very reluctant to believe, that, unless it be in other respects too weighty and

* Select Sermons. Sermon xv. Of industry in our particular calling as gentlemen.

various for the mind embarked in it, it can of necessity have this effect ; because full employment, besides being necessary to the comfortable subsistence of most persons, is in many points so beneficial to all ; because also it agrees so well with the short term of human life, and with the variety of human wants, exceeding in some respects what the mass of human exertion has yet achieved. It is therefore of great importance to consider whether we may not to a certain point diligently and strenuously employ our time and thoughts in active duties, without any detriment to devotional habits. That there is less *choice* of time, and less amount of it in any *single undivided* portion, for persons so employed to devote to contemplation and prayer, is evident. There appear however to be well-tried means, by which, if faithfully pursued, they may hope to secure an equal share of the substance and spirit of piety.

One of these is the rigorous reservation of a certain and fixed period, in each day, for religious exercises, which no claims of business, or of any other kind, shall infringe. In order to this, the practice of early rising, on other accounts so advantageous and commendable, is to a Christian actively engaged in business, indispensable. The earliest hour is with some the only season secure from

interruption; and even were a late hour of evening equally so, this time, though doubtless proper for devotion, is by no means so favourable to its vigorous, enlarged, and profitable performance. If there be any season when the mind is unwearied and unruffled, it must, in an ordinary state of health and of domestic affairs, be the first morning hour. An imperative rule of early devotion, were every thing really made to bend and yield to it, would very much govern the whole scheme of life; for by rendering necessary, to most persons, a proportionably early time of retiring to rest, it would preclude those midnight toils, and midnight recreations, (though the latter term can be applied but in irony,) from which piety and health, it is believed, have suffered equal loss. While tenacious of this early hour of solitude, the man of business, except his best desires be dormant, will be fully awake to its value; well knowing that he cannot, like the recluse, choose among other hours, he will solemnly apply himself to improve the consecrated moments which he has redeemed from indulgence, and guarded from intrusion.—Were we debarred from uninterrupted intercourse with the dearest relative, except daily or weekly at a fixed hour, as some state prisoners and victims of persecution have been, it is possible that more affection would

be expressed, more consolation sought and obtained, in those limited interviews, than in the possession of constant and undisturbed access. Thus we may believe, that, where the heart really craves spiritual blessings, a season of devotion is more beneficially used by the man of business, in his treasured allotment of sacred time, than by the hermit in his cell or wilderness, where nothing interrupts a free and protracted intercourse with heaven.

The case however of the most busy among Christians, is far from analagous to that of the prisoner, restricted to a few stated interviews of affection. We cannot forget the privilege which enables the most active to multiply their opportunities of devotion ; that of seizing brief intervals of mental engagement, for devout thoughts and aspirations. No restraint, no society, no interruption, can wholly forbid access to, a Friend ever present and invisible, “to whom all hearts are open.” If we could happily so control our minds, that they should turn and ascend, even in our unclaimed moments, to the best objects of meditation and desire, then the most conscientious economists of time would not have to reckon those portions of it lost in which they had resorted to no visible employ. They are lost, only because we are slow and poor proficient in the secret direction

of the mind : or they are partially lost, because we are not so “ fervent in spirit ” as to render the contemplation intent, and the prayer definite ; which alone could give a substantial character to each. We may indeed be sometimes *tempted* to account them lost, even though devotionally occupied ; because we are creatures of sense, ever liable to the erroneous impression that sensible things are the most real,—that five minutes are more truly *used* in instructive reading than in devout thought,—that a silent petition is not equivalent to a written line : but in the eye of faith these estimates must often be reversed. If we attained a happy facility in thus improving unappropriated minutes, the fruits of thought might be far more excellent, though far less directly apparent, than the labours of the chancellor of France, who is said to have penned a bulky volume in the successive intervals of daily waiting for dinner.

The author before quoted has a column for “ the vegetative life, abandoned to doing nothing ; ” and he justly observes, “ wise men will be loth to let the sum of hours in this column quickly increase.”* —With men of business we know it *cannot* be rapidly augmented ; but we would rather ask,—

* *Mémorial Horaire*, p. 13.

Why, even with men of leisure, when the mind is in a healthful state, should this record be augmented or begun? since the thought of our best hopes and desires is not a toilsome thought, and yet converts the vegetative into the meditative life, than which two sorts of life none can interiorly differ more, though they may appear exteriorly the same. The acquisition of such a habit, which pre-supposes a right judgment of its value, would have also an indirect utility, in preventing that impatience which active and earnest minds feel at broken appointments, at time consumed in waiting or travelling, and at the nameless diversity of situations permitting no regular employ.

But besides aiming at the happiest use of such inevitable intervals, a Christian is encouraged to convert his whole life into a kind of devotion, by a very frequent though transient recurrence to the thought of the Divine will, and of that providential destination which has perscribed his course. St. Paul has enjoined this in its utmost extent. "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Not that the glory of God can always be the distinct object of thought, but it may well be conceived to govern the mind in the same sense as many minds are governed by the love of wealth or fame, or by a strong

earthly attachment. The ruling passion does not always distinctly or expressly engage the thoughts, but it always influences or modifies the conduct. That which is not directly conducive to its aim, is yet not inconsistent with it. Not only in vacant hours or moments does the soul turn to its chosen meditation, dwelling on past disappointment or success, and devising new expedients, but there is a sort of secondary and concurring attention to the object even amidst the most remote pursuits. By the limitation of them, if by nothing else, this is manifest.

We have seen the master of a vessel act for the most part as his own pilot. His other cares and pursuits have been various. Sometimes he has been directing the repair of a mast, the use of a sail, the display of a signal; sometimes watching preparations for the comfort of his crew or passengers, sometimes engaged in a hearty repast; now using his telescope, and now in lively conversation; but still his hand was on the helm, or not far off, and his whole days were days of pilotage.

These hints on the expedients by which an active life may be made also a devotional life, are in no respect new. Indeed their worth consists in their being old, supported by the attestations of experience; and were it not in the view of now adducing

such, from the writings of men of business, it would not perhaps have been worth while to suggest the previous considerations. When we cite Fenelon, no one who reflects on the business of an archiepiscopal province, will consider him as a less appropriate example because an ecclesiastic; or if any one should, our first quotations will correct that mistake. “It is now four months,” (he writes to a friend,) “that I have had no leisure at all for study; but I am glad to dispense with study, and to attach myself to nothing, as soon as Providence unsettles me. It may be that this winter I shall be able to replace myself in my cabinet; but then I shall only enter it to remain as with one foot uplifted, ready to quit it on the slightest signal.”* In another letter he says, “I am desirous of going to see you, but I have no time for it. I must confer with the Chapter on a process which I am expediting,—I must write letters,—I must examine an account. Oh, how frightful would life be in so thorny a detail, if the will of God did not embellish all the occupations which he gives us!”† These passages sufficiently shew, that when Fenelon wrote of a life of busi-

* Œuv. Spirit. Lett. 154, Tom iii. p. 411.

† *Ibid.* Lett. 228, Tom iv. p. 130.

ness, he wrote experimentally. He often counsels others not to repine at this condition. Thus to a friend much occupied at court he writes, “The pain endured in this state of subjection, is a lassitude of nature, which longs to console itself; not a prompting of the Spirit of God. We think we regret God, and it is self that we regret; what is felt most painfully in this disturbed and oppressive situation, is that we can never be at liberty with ourselves; it is the taste for *me* which remains, and which seeks repose, that we may enjoy, in our own way, our talents, our sentiments, and all our good qualities, in the society of certain delicate persons, suited to make us feel all which this self has in it to charm; or at least we would in silence enjoy God and the sweets of piety; whereas it is God’s purpose to assert his right over us and break our schemes, that we may be pliant to all his will.”* Reflections like these, the good prelate frequently introduces with a more distinct reference to his personal circumstances. We may therefore certainly accept the following counsels from his pen as the dictates of a full and long experience. “We must reserve the needful hours for communing with God in prayer. Persons who

* Œuv. Spir. Tom ii. p. 135.

are in considerable offices, have so many indispensable duties to fulfil, that scarcely any time remains to them for communion with God, except they strictly apply themselves to its regulation.—It is necessary then to be firm in adopting and observing a rule. Our rigour in this may seem excessive; but without it all falls into confusion; we are dissipated and relaxed; we lose our strength, we are insensibly at a distance from God.”* On the other point, frequency of mental devotion, his advice is more explicit and minute.—“We must turn all our moments to account; when waiting for some one, when going from place to place, when with persons so willing to talk that we have only to let them proceed, one lifts up the heart an instant to God, and one is thus renovated for further engagements.—We must lay hold of all intervening moments. It is not with piety as with temporal affairs. Those demand undisturbed and stated periods for unbroken and long application; but piety needs not an application so lengthened, close, and continuous. In a moment, one may recal the presence of God, love him, adore him, offer to him what is done or suffered, and tranquillize before him all the agitations of the heart.”†

* Œuv. Spir. Tom i. p. 101.

† *Ibid.* Tom ii. p. 154.

To the same purpose he elsewhere says, “If you are not at liberty to reserve large portions of time, do not neglect to economize the less ; half a quarter of an hour, secured, by this care and faithfulness, from amidst pressing avocations, will be in the sight of God worth whole hours given to him in times of freedom. Besides, several little intervals collected through the day, will together make up something considerable ; you will even perhaps derive from this method the advantage of remembering God more frequently, than as if you gave to Him only one assigned period.”*

It may be desirable to subjoin to this the testimony of a layman, whose claims to the character of a man of business, are, if possible, still less questionable. Sir Matthew Hale filled the successive offices of Chief Baron of the Exchequer, and Chief Justice of the King’s Bench, during fifteen years ; and, besides a previous judicial station, had passed his life in the laborious pursuits which qualify for these. After having for a time neglected study at Oxford, where he was noted as robust and expert in fencing, at the age of twenty he entered at Lincoln’s Inn, where for many years he studied sixteen hours a day.†

* Œuv. Spir. Tom i. p. 258.

† Dr. Burnet’s Life of Hale.—We have also his own testi-

In one of this Judge's papers, "The account of the good steward," which the friend who published them calls "his very picture," he states, "I have endeavoured to husband this short, uncertain, important talent (time) as well as I could,—by dedicating and setting apart some portion of my time to prayer and reading of thy word; which I have constantly and peremptorily observed, whatever occasions interposed, or importunity persuaded the contrary."* We see therefore that he gives advice founded on his own practice, when in another place he enjoins, "Be obstinately constant to your devotions at certain set times;"† and we may form the same opinion as to the following observations and counsels on other points which have been named.—"An industrious husbandman, tradesman, scholar, will never want business fitted for occasional vacancies and *horæ subsecivæ*. Gellius's *Noctes Atticæ* have left us an experiment of it;

mony to the variety and amount of his employment. "I have been near fifty years a man as much conversant in business, and that of moment and importance, as most men;—my hands and mind have been as full of secular businesses, both before and since I was a judge, as it may be any man's in England."—Advice to his Grandchildren, pages 72, 73, 74.

* Contemplations, p. 238, 239.

† *Ibid.* p. 216.

and a Christian, even as such, hath ready employment for occasional interstices, reading, praying ;”* and again ;—“ Whatever you do, be very careful to maintain in your heart a *habit of religion*.—This will put itself into acts, even although you are not in a solemn posture of religious worship, and will lend you multitudes of religious applications to Almighty God, upon all occasions, and interventions, which will not at all hinder you in your secular occasions, but better and further you. It will give a tincture of devotion upon all your secular employments, and turn those actions which are materially civil or natural, into the very true and formal nature of religion ; and make your whole life to be an unintermitted life of duty to God. For this habit of piety in your soul will not lie sleeping and unactive, but almost in every hour of the day will put forth actual exertings of itself in applications of short occasional prayers, thanksgiving, dependence, resort unto that God that is always near you, and lodgeth in a manner in your heart by his fear, and love, and habitual religion towards him.—Thus, (he adds,) you doubly redeem your time. 1. In those natural and civil concerns which are not only per-

* Contemplations, p. 215.

mitted, but in a great measure enjoined by Almighty God. 2. At the same time exercising acts of religious duties, observance, and veneration, by perpetuated, or at least frequently reiterated, though short acts of devotion to him. And this is the great art of Christian chymistry, to convert those acts that are materially natural or civil, into acts truly and formally religious; whereby the whole course of this life is both truly and interpretatively a service to Almighty God, and an uninterrupted state of religion; which is the best and noblest, and most universal redemption of his time.”* These extracts, even as here abridged, are not recommended by a neat or concise style; they were the extemporaneous unrevised writing of a man of business, published not only without his knowledge, but against his wish. While valuable for their piety and wisdom, they are more than doubly so as exhibiting what must be supposed in a great measure the writer’s habits and rules of life. Admonitions, in a work designed for public use, may occasion a far too favourable estimate of their author’s moral attainments; of which, (as a probable consequence,) this volume is a humbling proof to

* Contemplations, p. 217.

myself. If, on the other hand, there be any case in which we may conclude a substantial and steadfast practice to have been the basis of excellent rules, it is that of a character so firm and regular as Judge Hale, sketching a plan of religious life, not for the public eye, but only for that of his children and intimate connexions.

The temper of mind which these eminent persons have described, should by no means be conceived of as adverse to a well-regulated cheerfulness and freedom of spirit. Fenelon warns his correspondents against constrained, austere, and absent manners. A fund of genuine cheerfulness should be created in the mind, by the heartfelt consecration of ordinary acts and circumstances to God's will and service ; the habitual reference of all our customary pursuits to his good pleasure, is sufficient to adorn and dignify them all. This truth cannot perhaps be better impressed on memory than by the quaint lines of the excellent Herbert, where he speaks of the "elixir" of piety, as decorating, and even transmuting, the lowliest employ.

" All may of Thee partake :
Nothing can be so mean,
Which with this tincture,—*for thy sake*,
Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine ;
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold :
For that which God doth touch and own,
Cannot for less be told.

XXIV.

ON THE PREVALENT UNBELIEF WHICH FRUSTRATES PRAYER, AND THE IMPERFECT FAITH WHICH MAY BE ERRONEOUSLY IMAGINED TO DO SO.

It is evident that the Founder of our religion and his inspired followers have treated faith and unbelief in divine revelation as qualities or acts of a moral kind, the one acceptable to God, the other criminal in his sight. This statement has been cavilled at by rejecters of the gospel, who have plausibly argued, that our viewing a narrative or a proposition as true or untrue, is an act merely intellectual and in no respect moral. But even if it were not observable, in contradiction to this, how greatly the wills and passions of men influence their intellectual acts and habits, yet might those reasonings be sufficiently refuted by considering the

natural and proximate *effects* of such unbelief. If a chemist shew me a vase of apparently clear water or pure air, and say,—On strictly analyzing this, I can detect no deleterious ingredient,—great as may be his skill, and unable as I may be to confute him scientifically, yet if I find my own health, and that of others, impaired by tasting or inhaling the fluid, I shall rather trust in experience than in the most subtle analysis. This comparison might serve if we could only ascertain some latent connexion between unbelief and moral evil, without being able to discover a reason of that connexion. But the reason is easily discerned. Unbelief of divine truths is a destitution of the only efficient principles by which the moral and spiritual life can be sustained. The experimentalist may display a vessel from which air has been more or less exhausted, and may tell us there is nothing pernicious in it ; but if we discover a deficiency of support for animal and vegetable life, we shall charge him with a poor equivocation. An exclusion of those truths which are supereminently moral, such as the perfect holiness or rectitude of God, and the destination of man to glorify and enjoy him, (truths which revelation alone demonstrates,) is an exclusion of the only sufficient aliment of true virtue. We

may as well expect a singing-bird to be vocal in a *receiver*, where he has little or no air to respire, as expect the genuine exercise of real goodness from him who has no faith in God. It may however be said,—The physical vacuum is artificial, and he who creates it is accountable for its effects ; but the destitution of faith is natural and inevitable to my mind.—This we should dispute, even were it *possible* for the mind of any man to be in this void or negative state with regard to moral opinions: we should say,—Although it be natural, it may not be inevitable. Prejudice and insensibility have closed and sealed the mind against the admission of what is good and true : let these be removed, and the most essential and valuable truths will then find entrance.—But such a moral void, such a blank and neutral state of mind, is not in fact possible. Into the heart of man evil thoughts and principles must rush when good ones are excluded ; nay, the former are already there ; generated and evolved within ; and to describe unbelief under the figure of a vacuum, is merely to say that the mind is void of the principles of good, because it is pre-occupied and filled with those of evil. The less there is of religious belief, the more of irreligious sentiment ; and the greater the evolution or the

influx of this, by the agency of bad passions, or of bad associations, the more is religious faith expelled or excluded.

This figure is indeed founded on a view of faith and unbelief, which some have thought incorrect, namely, that they admit of *degrees* ; but it is a view which the language of scripture sanctions,* with which experience accords, and which enables us to apprehend how an act of prayer may be performed, and be in some sense real, while there is yet a prevalence of unbelief which frustrates it.

That such is the *fact*, I believe many persons who practise secret prayer, must be painfully convinced, although its *explanation* may not be easy to them. He who is not conscious of sometimes praying with a measure of unbelief which it may be justly feared will render his prayer ineffectual, is either a person of great singleness and fervour of spirit, or else has not searched far enough into the folds of his own heart. For we appeal to those who rigorously examine the motive and temper of their devotions, whether it be not too possible, to pray, even in

* See various passages which speak of "great" and of "little faith," as Matthew xv. 28.—xiv. 31.—vi. 30. Luke vii. 9, &c.—of its "increase" or "growth," as Luke xvii. 5.—2 Corinthians x. 15.—2 Thessalonians i. 3.:—of its "weakness," "strength," and "fulness," as Romans iv. 19, 20.—Acts vi. 5.

secret, with a deplorably imperfect exercise of faith. We may be actuated by habit, together with a general conviction of the duty and advantage of prayer, and the sinfulness of its omission ; by a feeble wish, even at the worst, to avoid evil and pursue good ; but still we may have a secret presentiment that our prayers will not at this time overcome the corrupt bias. We may pray, to soothe and pacify conscience, and to acquire the specious plea that we have sought divine help, but we may yet have no firm desire or design to unite our best efforts with our prayers, in reliance on the help which we seek. The suppressed language of the heart, in such cases, seems to be this ;—If God will work irresistibly, if He will check and turn my inclination so powerfully that it shall be at no cost of mine, I shall be rescued and thankful. I will pray therefore, although my prevalent desire runs counter to my prayer ; but I scarcely expect success.—Have we never, before secret devotion, had some such indistinct views in the mind as these, —To-day I shall be tempted to the edge of a sinful pleasure, or to the neglect of a self-denying duty. I feel how great a weight there is in the scale of wrong inclination. I must put some weight into the other scale, that of wisdom and piety. I will therefore pray as I am accustomed to do. I will

ask for spiritual strength, and grace to be kept from evil : but yet I foresee that unless far more be given than I at present expect or *desire*, the scale of inclination will preponderate.—There is in this temper of heart an awful approach to trifling with Omniscience ; a sort of prevarication with Him “ from whom no secrets are hid ;” which as far as it prevails is no less unbelieving than presumptuous. While the mind acquiesces in such a kind of self-deceit, it cannot be supposed, nor is it indeed anticipated, that prayer will be effectual.

Such is our distressing experimental knowledge, that an act of secret prayer may take place, and yet be frustrated by prevailing unbelief ; but the *explanation* of this fact seems to depend on the principle before-named ; that faith and unbelief admit of various degrees, and may thus co-exist in the mind. If they were not only contrary qualities, but each necessarily complete and exclusive of its opposite, it would not be conceivable than any one under the power of unbelief should intend or attempt prayer. If he appear to pray, it must be an act of mere hypocrisy or simulation. But admitting that proportions of faith and unbelief may be mingled in the same mind, that the habitual predominance of faith constitutes an effective reception of the gospel, that there are

cases in which this predominance is for a time doubtful, and others in which, without an entire absence of faith, unbelief either habitually or occasionally prevails, then we give scope for a supposition which agrees with experience, namely, that there may be a degree of faith which prompts even to secret prayer, and yet a prevalent unbelief which frustrates it. Now it is very important for all who are conscious of a lamented measure of unbelief, to ascertain whether their state of mind needs to be essentially changed and rectified, in order to the success of prayer ; that if it do, this change may first be sought ; that if it do not, groundless mistrust and fear may be removed.

The true indication of that predominant unbelief, whether temporary or habitual, which, while it continues, must vitiate prayer, is a prevalence of *insincerity* in purpose and desire ; a practical bent towards evil, while we are yet in some lesser degree desiring, and in some sense imploring, that which is good. Faith, if we may extend the former figure by alluding to aërostation, is like the rare fluid which causes the aëronaut to ascend ; unbelief, or that stream of evil thoughts and tendencies for which unbelief makes room, and which therefore may borrow its name, is like that gross atmosphere which enters or acts as the finer fluid is dis-

placed, and brings him down to earth. But the principles of faith and unbelief are less perceptible and measurable than the fluids by which we would illustrate their operation. It is by his actual ascending or descending motion that the aëronaut must often judge what is the state of the balloon; it is by trying to ascertain the practical bias and tendency of the soul in our devotions that we must judge whether faith or unbelief prevail; consequently whether we be likely to attain the heavenly blessings solicited.

If some professed Christians were to watch the movement of their own hearts, would it not be found, that, even amidst devotion, there is an internal dispute with themselves, and serious wavering on the whole question, whether they will give themselves to God or no? whether they will, in very deed, and heartily, accept the Son of God as a Saviour and Ruler, or only receive him vaguely as the world receives him? whether they will unreservedly dedicate themselves to Jehovah, or whether compromise between him and their own corrupt inclinations and various idols; and all this with a certain leaning and preference toward the *wrong*? A person who thus habitually and yieldingly wavers toward evil, cannot reasonably expect success in his entreaties for the blessing of a

holy God. Could a prince be judged likely to grant the petitions of a subject whom he had secret means of knowing to be still disaffected in heart, still disposed to withhold or defer a genuine and grateful submission, and sometimes meditating the transfer of his allegiance to a usurper? When, without renouncing prayer, we “regard iniquity,”* we are in effect making the vain attempt to “serve two,” (or many) masters.” Such a state has been aptly compared in scripture to the motion of a wave, “driven of the wind and tossed.” There is no steady current in the soul, bearing it towards God and happiness; but it is like a billow, sparkling perhaps while scattered, but scattered not the less; dashed upon rocks, rolled over quicksands, lost in the whirlpool.

But there may be a more apparent and promising desire to serve God than exists in the character just referred to, and yet attended with a self-delusion which frustrates prayer. Piety may only have its turn with many changing inclinations of the soul. The feelings and imagination are perhaps sometimes as sensibly borne in this as in other directions. But the fluctuating desire of the best blessings is succeeded by a stronger, more effectual,

* Psalm lxvi. 18.

and more enduring bent toward what is sinful. He who has been accustomed to these unhappy variations, cannot but, in some measure, suspect, even while he feels pious wishes, that they have no root, but will be displaced and supplanted, like many which preceded them ;—that he is himself “ unstable as water.” For, we apprehend, there is a difference in *kind*, and this not indiscernible, between a steady desire that the word and Spirit of God should rule us, and a flow of feeling which is deceptive in its rise, and soon to fail. The fallaciousness of this may be estimated, even while it exists, from its similarity to other emotions, which have passed away. Such a mind is not so fitly imaged by a wave, in the ordinary sense of that word, as by irregular tides, often flowing and ebbing with unlooked-for frequency.*

Now while the subject of this allowed fickleness, frames his devotions on the supposition that his heart is right in the sight of God, he cannot reasonably expect the benefits of prayer. Let him rather, in his best moments, never seek to disguise from himself his unhappy instability, but fervently

* Such a remarkable tide was witnessed in several ports of Great Britain in the summer of 1824, running in contrary directions, hourly, or half-hourly.

implore of the Holy Spirit to fix his wavering will, and give constancy to every pious affection. *Thus* praying, he may justly appropriate to himself much scriptural encouragement. If a youth, who has given many and recent proofs of caprice and unsteadiness, go to his parent, or tutor, and beg to be assisted in some art, or to be indulged in some privilege, which requires the exercise of opposite qualities to these, the discerning friend, who detects the prevalent temper even in the midst of his solicitations, may well say,—No ;—because to-morrow, or next week, you will desire no such thing ; you are even aware of this at the present moment, if you will but consult experience, and examine your disposition strictly. Ask me rather, first to teach you a right estimate of things, and influence you to a just steadfastness of purpose. When these are acquired, you will be prepared to receive other benefits and further enjoyments ; which you well know I shall rejoice to communicate.

The two states of mind which have been glanced at, evince a strong prevalence of insincerity and unbelief ; not only sufficient, while it subsists, to frustrate prayer, but also disproving the fact of spiritual renovation. It is here, however, requisite to observe, that, under the force of particular

temptations, there may arise a sinful wavering, and even averseness to what piety dictates, in characters essentially differing from each of those described : possessing, in the judgment of charity, a renewed mind, and having a consciousness of desires to serve God, and to partake his favour, which are genuine, and which ordinarily prevail. The heart, for a season, may be faithless to these its best purposes and convictions ; hurried from its most settled aims by the revolt of passion, or “ drawn away by its own desire, and enticed,” and making but a faint resistance to this misleading force. Now, when prayer is offered in such a disposition, there is, for the time, a prevalence of unbelief and insincerity in it ; and, consequently, little reason to hope for its success. This is indeed the state of feeling which I attempted to trace when arguing the possibility of praying in secret without prevalent faith. We do not speak of a mere *conflict* in the mind, but of a sort of treachery, for the time, among its better principles ; a meditated concession and surrender of its convictions to unbelief and sin ; like the temper of a garrison, who almost consent to yield and capitulate, while they still raise the signals of opposition, and adhere to the forms of defence.

Whenever we are conscious of this temper, we

have a most melancholy internal proof of the duplicity and depraved weakness of our moral nature; and such as must always induce, while we have any tenderness of conscience, or remains of genuine faith, very painful doubts as to the reality of our conversion; for, its not inducing any such doubts, would certainly shew that no faith, founded on scriptural principles as to the evil of sin, and the necessity of holiness, existed.

Yet it would be wrong to despair of our spiritual state on account of the occasional prevalence of unbelief and insincerity in our prayers; or to conclude that this, their temporary character, if it be the subject of grief and penitence, will frustrate those which are offered in a better spirit.

No Christian, perhaps, will pronounce himself absolutely free from an admixture of unbelief and insincerity of heart; it is therefore very important to our spiritual advancement, as well as comfort, not to imagine that this alloy can disprove our possession of real faith, or render all our prayers fruitless.

I would, accordingly, remark, that there may even be a temper of mind not so *occasional* as that last mentioned, and, indeed, in appearance, nearly allied to the two former, yet in fact far from being identical with those, or similar in its consequence.

For there may exist a yet unsubdued degree of practical vacillation, or there may be still a remaining struggle, as to the entire renunciation of sin, and unhesitating choice of God's service, or as to the absolute and confiding acceptance of divine mercy through a Divine Redeemer,—which should by no means lead to the conclusion that prayer will be inefficacious, provided there be a sincere and usually prevailing desire in the heart of him who prays, (although combated and almost overborne sometimes by opposite desires,) that the will of God be done, and his truth received, that heavenly light and guidance be obtained, that grace and strength be given, and good overcome evil: and provided these devotional desires be attended by a practical effort to “keep himself from his iniquity.” It cannot be doubted that somewhat of this struggle subsists in the mind of young inquirers, and unconfirmed believers; and it would be most erroneous to infer from it that their supplications will be vain. If amidst every varied conflict, the suppliant still in some sense “consent unto the law that it is good,” if he in any measure “delight in it after the inward man,” if he long to be delivered from all secret reluctance and enmity, there is the strongest encouragement to a steadfast hope that he shall be heard and sus-

tained, and that “the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus” will at length “make him free from the law of sin and death.”

Still less can it be concluded that he who endures inward conflicts of a more speculative or theoretical kind, is to despond of the success of prayer. We may, whether by suggestions of human or superhuman adversaries, or by some inherent causes, “be shaken in mind,” and “troubled” as to the very basis of religious faith, such as the truth of the Scriptures, the meaning of their weightiest doctrines, the mysteries of Providence, or the very existence of God. Some eminently pious men have left it on record that such reasonings and suspicions have occasionally harassed and distressed them even in acts of solemn worship, or in the prospect of these engagements. The mind has been deeply agitated by doubts, and in this sense has resembled the driven and restless wave; but who will maintain that, while “instant in prayer,” under these adverse and oppressive feelings, they did not “ask in faith?” Their faith was surely proved and manifested by their perseverance in the duty of supplication, and adherence to the hope which prompts it, amidst these sore disquietudes. Though moved like the broken billows, they resembled more truly the vessels anchored on those

billows, or moored to the rock which they vainly assault ; though “ tossed with tempests ” long and vehemently, they were still securely holden, and at length “ there was a great calm.”

And if these internal conflicts, even respecting fundamental truths, cannot be supposed to frustrate prayer, least of all can the want of full assurance as to our personal interest in the blessings of the gospel, be thought to do so. The number of Christians in modern days, who combine a full assurance of salvation with a spirit of unimpeachable humility, I have not observed to be great ; there would doubtless be much oftener a happy approximation to it, if we exercised, together with a more simple grateful confidence in the divine promises, a higher measure of devout vigilance, and of consistency in Christian deportment. Those persons, however, if such there be, who account this full assurance a necessary mark of true faith, must at least be deemed to err far more widely, than certain divines of great piety who seem to have thought it unattainable.

The painful fact remains unaltered by reasonings, that many do entertain habitual fears as to the genuineness of their own faith, consequently as to their real conversion and eventual salvation, which we have reason to hope are groundless ; that

many others have similar apprehensions and suspicions which do *not* appear unfounded ; and that many whose general piety we cannot question, are yet brought, by occasional declensions and relapses, into that state of temporary doubt and despondency which is their just, although distressing effect. Now, different as these characters and their respective states may be, there is this agreement in them, that each entertaining doubts whether he *has* real faith, no one of them can be sure that he really “*asks* in faith.” But it would be a pernicious subtlety, fatal to his spiritual progress, working the very evil which it pre-supposes, to imagine, that on account of this uncertainty, prayer will be ineffectual. It would imply that nothing but that “full assurance of faith,”* which, if it exist on earth in the sense some attach to it, must be the perfection, the ultimate limit, of spiritual attainment, can in fact qualify us to ask with success for spiritual blessings ; so that the prerequisite for effectual prayer would seem itself to render prayer superfluous.

Let those who are visited with such self-impeding refinements of distrust, first undertake to *prove* (not by vague and dark suspicions, but by a strict

* Hebrews x. 22.

demonstration, which they never can produce) that they possess no grain or spark of faith; and then let them begin to conclude that prayer will be necessarily fruitless. They may indeed be “of little faith;” so little as to induce doubts of its existence; but our Saviour ascribed miraculous efficacy to that minute measure of faith which he compared to the least of the seeds that are in the earth; and if such a measure of faith “wrought miracles,” why shall it not obtain divine blessings from Him who “giveth to all men liberally,” and who says, “every one that asketh receiveth?” As a farther scriptural confirmation, it may be observed, that were the various conflicts of unbelief or fear with weak and imperfect faith, which have been enumerated, to be regarded as frustrating prayer, then he who entreated of Jesus the cure of his suffering child, and said, “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief,” had no ground to expect success: for this language itself, and his previous address, “*if* thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us,” strongly imply a conflict of doubt and distrust, both as to the power of Him to whom he prayed, and as to his own possession of the requisite state of mind. Yet the benefit which, though with a faith thus feeble, he implored in earnest sincerity, was at once conferred.

Nothing which has been here advanced on the compatibility of a low degree of faith with success in prayer, is to be construed as destructive of the position first defended, that unbelief in divine truth is strictly connected with moral evil. The connexion is doubtless with different modifications of evil, and these differing greatly in malignancy ; but we conceive it is never wholly absent.

With respect, for example, to the last temper of mind adverted to, that of doubt as to the reality of our faith and conversion ; I think we may affirm that it is always, in part at least, excited by the subsistence and perception of moral evil in ourselves. It could have no place in a mind perfectly renewed in holiness, absolutely freed from sin, unless we suppose that such a sinless mind might be subjected to the malady of *utterly false* perception. —The void of faith and piety, which we sometimes may mournfully apprehend to exist within us, is partially real : and so far as it is real, it is formed by that body of sin which our inward view discovers. Without doubt, in morbid cases, the spectre is exceedingly magnified and multiplied ; so that evil may be conceived to reign throughout the soul, when this is very far from being the fact ; but yet there is more or less of evil existing, upon which the illusion founds itself. There is a real

foe, though fear has invested him with a seeming ubiquity and dominion which are *not* real. However distressful these doubts, and however inevitable they may appear, sin is their prime source ; and having such an origin as well as subject, it is no wonder that they are deeply afflictive.

And in regard to speculative questionings or misgivings concerning religious truth, even though they should be invariably the matter of unfeigned sorrow and repugnance, which would go nearest to prove that he whose mind they assailed was not morally accountable, yet it might be asked,—Was there not a past period of life, when they were *welcome* to the mind ? Did not pride and sensuality formerly invite them ? Were not early habits of thought and practice formed, by which these “evil reasonings”* were nurtured in the heart ? And now, according to the well-known laws of human nature, must it not be expected that the same trains of speculation, however grievous to the renewed mind, should continue sometimes to haunt it ; especially when pride or sensuality, by the agency of temptation, evolves itself in the soul, producing (to revert to a former illustration) a proportionate void of faith, is it not natural that it

* διαλογισμοὶ πονηροί. Matthew xv. 19.

should flow in the secret mazes where it once, and long perhaps, was *taught* to flow ?

If we ascribe these unbelieving thoughts to Satanic suggestion, as their sudden and violent incursion has induced many Christians to do, this may seem, at first sight, to transfer the moral evil of their mere existence away from the recipient ; yet it should be remembered, that if the guileful enemy of truth inject a poison, it is because he detects room for its admission ; there is, as it were, some recess within the soul, which he “ findeth empty ” of pious truths and sentiments, because replete with a subtle element of evil, not wanting affinity with the dark mischief he would infuse.

We may in this manner regard all unbelief as having, although in different modes and measures, a connexion with sin : and yet in perfect consistency with this, we may maintain the encouraging argument which has been urged, that nothing but an unbelief habitually predominant can frustrate prayer.

And on this last state of mind, (which was the first delineated,) I would observe, in concluding, that however it may annul, while it subsists, the *benefit* of prayer, it cannot annul the *duty*. He who is conscious of a general repugnance to God’s will, or of a very unstable fallacious wish to fulfil

it, is not therefore released from the *duty* of praying; for no creature capable of volition can be exempt from the duty of seeking his Creator's approbation, and his own true happiness. So long as his prayers (if offered) continue to be forms of hypocrisy or acts of self-delusion, they must continue fruitless. But he is bound to pray for "a new heart;"* for the true "quickening" of the "incorruptible seed;" in order that he may afterwards receive those successive "showers of blessing" which the Giver of life will not withhold, which will rear it into a fair and vigorous plant, and fructify it as a "tree of righteousness." If he refuse to entreat that primary gift, it is a *moral* incapacity, a depraved will, which forbids. If he really and perseveringly implore it, the word of God declares "it shall be given;"† and then without question he will gratefully record, that it was God's *preventing* mercy which inclined him so to seek the heavenly boon.‡

But if we cannot disprove, and dare not deny, that the beginnings of "a right spirit" have been given us, that we have some abiding desire for spiritual happiness, and some kind and degree of

* Ezekiel xxxvi. 26.

† Matthew vii. 7, 8. James i. 5.

‡ See Note G, at the end of the volume.

faith, however weak or diminutive, in the great things which revelation declares, then it behoves us to pray with a more hopeful and confiding spirit ; to grasp, though it be with a feeble hand, the inestimable promise ; and by the very act and exercise of faith, and the aids it will procure, to give to it a new expansion through the soul, that it may triumph over the noxious vapour which depresses and obscures it now.

XXV.

ON THE DEVOTIONAL TEMPER PROPER TO CONVALESCENCE.

Not only is the human frame in some instances so constituted, as greatly to resist or exclude the painful and debilitating sensations, but it also appears that there are *minds* possessing so happy a degree of independence on the body, as to be far less affected than others are by equal measures of its fatigue or weakness, its disorder or pain. Whether this privilege be the effect of a mental and moral strength intrinsically greater, able to withdraw or control itself away from mere sensation,—or whether it arises from a less strict and sympathetic connexion between thought, or those organs which develope it, and the other organs, no

earthly physiologist can tell. The question cannot even be *stated* with precision ; it turns on that close secret within us, which the acutest reasoner should be humbled by his incapacity to unlock, —the subsistence of a thinking power in a material structure.

But many minds,—and not among the least perspicacious,—so far from enjoying that peculiar independence, are exceedingly influenced by diversities of bodily feeling. Slight ailments produce in them such indisposedness for thought, as nothing but the strong sense of duty or impulse of circumstances can overcome. When these sensations are heightened into positive pain or unequivocal debility, then intellectual vigour (except by some special counteraction which cannot be ordinarily looked for) is proportionately broken or relaxed.

There is beauty in that simple scriptural figure, as applied to the moral and religious constancy of a patriarch,—“ his bow abode in strength ;”^{*} but it would be no unapt image of that *bodily* vigour without which devotional energy is often found to languish. Perhaps this sense is included in the figure as used by Job, “ My glory was fresh in me, and my bow was renewed in my hand.” The

^{*} Genesis xlix. 24.

bow is a delicate, though a primitive weapon. Too much tenison makes it unelastic; and the field of Cressy may remind us, that let but a thunder shower relax the string, and it will abide in strength no longer.

How painful to the Christian, if in seasons when he is most admonished of dependence on the Sovereign of life, and when mortal disease, though not perhaps imminent, is far more feelingly anticipated than in days of health, he thus finds a diminished power and readiness to commune with his Divine Supporter; with Him who when "flesh" shall irrecoverably "fail," can alone be the "strength of his heart and his portion for ever."

Yet, although the tone of health which conduces to mental animation be rightly termed a privilege, we can conceive that to some minds its partial absence may be always salutary; and that its heavier occasional interruptions are to all Christians a means of spiritual good; if only to disturb that "temple-haunting" pride, which, even amidst the warmth of real devotion, "hath found a nest for herself." The snares of false worship are remote from our eyes and from our thoughts; even if our birth-place did not preclude temptation to gross and palpable idolatries, few could "set up a golden image in the plain:" but many may resem-

ble the Assyrian in the dreams of pride, setting up a visionary image in the heart. Not that these dreams are sent of God, but He permits our vanity to raise them, and would teach us the lowliness of wisdom by their fall. When the faculties are well-tuned, and the expansion of thought and exuberance of feeling in prayer or contemplation elate the soul, then, amidst all our humiliating tenets and fluent confessions, the personal idol shines unseen, a “form” not indeed “terrible,” but full of grace, whose “brightness is excellent;” and while the lips and even the heart yield homage to Him that formed them, there is a covert sacrifice, a by-offering, to this purloining “Mercurius” within. But let sickness assail the body; let a distempered languor overspread the mind; and where is our household god of talent and elocution now? His shewy attributes have vanished; his wand and his wings are “broken together;” he is become “like the chaff of the summer threshing floors.” Thus are we taught, like the men of Lystra, to “turn from these vanities,” (which, though in our case latent, are not unreal,) and to bow in fainting humility before the living God; “cast down” into the conviction that self is nothing, and that He is All.

But there is a further good tendency in the dis-

abilities and depressions which sickness creates ; whether as they respect the duties of active life or those of worship.

Even were it certain that the servants of God on earth, taken collectively, honour him more as agents than as sufferers, still might each intermission of bodily and mental strength eminently promote his service on the whole, did we always rise or emerge with a chastened ardour, with a purer, steadier zeal, to improve the precious intervals, which may each be brief, and all must terminate ere long.

Some of the Canadian rivers have their course suspended in successive lakes. The stream which was rapid before, but tinged with earthy mixtures from many rills, is here become passive. Lately, it could bear forward the laden barge with swiftness ; now, the lightest canoe scarcely drifts upon the out-stretched waters.—But this inaction is purifying. All that was turbid subsides. And, when liberated from their bed of supineness, these clear smooth waves rush with accumulated strength down new and longer rapids, gliding amidst all obstacles, strong for every burden, hastening to the sea.

Will it not be thus, in some measure, with the convalescent Christian ? When mercy first

“ opened his heart,” as it “ clave the rocks in the wilderness,” and waters of devotion and benevolence gushed forth, they flowed it may be with a degree of turbulence ; their course was not quite noiseless, they were not unstained by the passions or unsworn by pride ; but He whose word created and called forth the stream, “ He turneth it whithersoever He will.” He has brought it into a wide and lengthened valley “ of the shadow of death ;” He has said “ Be still, and know that I am God ;” He has made it languish, but not to stagnate, only to be quieted and defecated there.

And now when he is pleased to give it egress, and bids it renew its full career in a channel prepared for its accelerated force, will it not flow forth, not merely more swift and strong, but more deep, and pure, and silent, than as if it had never been “ poured out” in that unwelcome suspension ?

Surely thus at least it *behoves* the Christian to resume his course after a season of restraint and inactivity. Besides having been incapacitated for other accustomed pursuits, he has perhaps found it often impracticable to lift up his soul continuously to God ; by reading or even hearing the Scriptures his weakened and susceptible frame has been quickly exhausted ; the alleviation of pain, or

present repose, has been more thirsted for than that sovereign good, which he accounts his treasure, more consciously valued than those promises which suffering ought to endear. As yet he cannot have forgotten these mortifying accompaniments of disease. The healthful should not willingly forget them ; rather ought they by express effort sometimes to recal or anticipate feelings which (except by a most unusual immunity,) must be shared by themselves in days or years that “draw nigh.” But to the convalescent this is no effort. Those recent feelings are still vividly depicted in his mind. If then he be yet in doubt as to his genuine participation of revealed blessings, what recollection can more strongly prompt the “diligence” which would “make his calling and election sure ;”—sure in the secret scrutiny of conscience, and by the faithful tests of Scripture? What can stimulate to this augmented diligence, if not the uneffaced perception that some hours of sickness might suffice to enervate the mind, perhaps irretrievably till death? If, on the contrary, an enlightened and cheering hope had been attained, and was not obscured during bodily illness, or is already brightened with reviving health, this happy state can never make pointless the striking admonitions which are addressed by such changes to the

heart of a true servant of God. He who only *assumed* “the form of a servant,” that Beloved Son who is the Father’s “sole complacence,” asked with reference to his *own* course, “Are there not twelve hours in the day?” He spoke with intentness of “the works which the Father had given him to *finish* :” and he said in prayer, with holy joy, at the retrospect of his labours, and the foresight of that decease which he was just accomplishing,—“I have glorified Thee on earth, I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”

The distance from the moral perfection and effective greatness of his works, to the adulteration and littleness of ours, is here no way forgotten : it does but give strength to our inference, that the fullest certainty of the divine approbation can be no plea for slighting one precious and precarious opportunity “to do God service.” What an unfilial contrast would such a plea present, not only to the temper of God’s “own Son,” but to that of his faithful missionary ; who made the sure and swift approach of full felicity his chosen argument for new devotedness.—“Now is it high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our *salvation* nearer.”*

* Romans xiii. 11.

Be the period of bodily convalescence that of spiritual confidence and gladness, or otherwise, it must in either case be a season for peculiar gratitude; in the one, that time and strength are given for attainments yet unsecured; in both, that what was "grievous" is removed, and that new means are imparted of serving our Divine Deliverer. These will now be far the more justly appreciated. The Christian may become, to the thoughtless visitors of that chamber which he is about to quit, like the prophetic watchman in the oracle of Dumah.* They ask him,—“What of the night?”—How have you passed these hours of wearisome seclusion?—He answers, “The morning cometh:—and also the night! If ye will inquire, inquire ye. Return,—come.”† The prophecy, as such, is among the most obscure; but this moral use of it would be no enigma. You ask me “What of the night?”—it were fruitless to describe the sensations of this constrained retirement, which you could not realize. Rather let me say, with grateful acknowledgment, “The *morning* cometh.”—I hope to use what may remain of this life’s brief and changeful day, with far more fervour of spirit and oneness of purpose. For

* Isaiah xxi. 11. Lowth.

† Isaiah xxi. 12.

now I am struck with the homefelt conviction, that, there cometh “also the *night* ;”—that night, which, for these mortal eyes, shall be followed by no day-break, till they are unsealed to the awful splendour of “new heavens and a new earth.” O could I transfuse into your mind the sentiments which now fill my own, and perpetuate their impressiveness in both ! “If you will inquire” into the will of the Supreme,—into the moral state, the real wants, the vast capabilities of your spirit,—into the crisis and the prospects of an illimitable being ;—“inquire” *now*,—while health remains unbroken, and your powers are unoppressed ! “Return from the wanderings of fancy, from the day-dream of sublunary hope, and muse awhile on those unimaginable visions which the night of death will bring ! “Come” now, before your day declines, “and the shadows of evening are stretched out,” and accept from redeeming mercy the pledges of admission to that heavenly dwelling, of which it is predicted, “There shall be no night there.”

“Behold the Lamb of God !”—he is “the light thereof ;” he must be the light to guide you thither : his ransom your sole title, his spirit your sole meetness, for that inheritance.

Thus might a convalescent Christian, imbued with the deepened sense of revealed truths, be led

to address others, and in part to admonish himself: at least that ancient warning from a royal pen cannot fail to be, from recent experience, more deeply graven in his heart,—“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device—in the grave,”—nor, probably, in the nearer and darker paths which lead to it.

Not that we can infer with certainty from a past degree of inability for devout exercises in sickness, that this will be augmented in the closing scene, or even that it will not be greatly removed.

The waters which are spread powerless and passive in the valley (to resume our former figure) may there be made the mirror of a glowing sunset, and “airs from heaven” may waft the bark upon their bosom, although motionless itself.

While Doddridge, emaciated by deep consumption, was on his voyage to a grave at Lisbon, he several times said to his beloved wife,—“I cannot express to you what a morning I have had; such delightful and transporting views of the heavenly world is my Father now indulging me with as no words can express.”* Before his embarkation, he

* Orton's Life of Doddridge, p. 345.

said to a friend,—“ My soul is *vigorous* and *healthy*, notwithstanding the hastening decay of this frail and tottering body. The most distressing nights to this frail body have been as the *beginning of heaven* to my soul. God hath, as it were, let heaven down upon me in those nights of weakness and waking.”*

Still more instructing and consolatory, because more copious, are the dying conversations of Halyburton,† who has himself recorded his previous

* Orton's Life of Doddridge, pp. 333, 334.

† A learned and pious Minister in the Scoth Church, Professor of Divinity at St. Andrew's; who died September 23, 1712, æt. 37. In the year preceding his death, was born his philosophic countryman, who found it “as clear as any purpose of nature can be, that the whole scope and intention of man's creation is limited to the present life; and that those who inculcate the doctrine of a future state have no other motive than to gain a livelihood, and to acquire power and riches in this life.” See Monthly Review for June 1784, vol. 70, p. 428.—A brother philosopher has invited the world to admire the satisfied and facetious exit of Hume; but simple people will still prefer the last thoughts and prospects of Halyburton. It may be that some refined reader will have a degree of involuntary distaste for the mode of expression in part of the following quotations; (and it would be increased by reading the whole memoir;) but, besides that this was the language of Scotland, and of the 17th century, what sort of taste do we detect in ourselves, except a taste for fiction, when we would have research of words and elegance of style from the dying?

severe and frequent conflicts, through many years, with speculative unbelief and various temptation. While enduring extreme debility and pain, he said to his physician,—“ Verily there is a reality in religion. Few have the lively impressions of it. —The little acquaintance I have had with God within these two days, has been better than ten thousand times the pains I have all my life been at about religion.”* At another time,—“ These fourteen or fifteen years I have been studying the promises ; but I have seen more of the book of God this night than all that time.”† To one of his students,—“ If I had you lads all about me now, I would give you a lesson of divinity : however, this will be a standing witness of the reality, solidity, power and efficacy of these truths I taught you ; for, by the power of that grace revealed in these truths, here I lie pained without pain, without strength and yet strong. I think it would not be a lost session this, though you were all here.”‡ On the sabbath, two days before his decease, he said,—“ This night my skin has burnt, my heart has panted, my body has been bruised on the bed with weakness, and there is a sore upon me that is racking my spirit, and my heart has

* *Memoirs*, p. 179. edit. 1821. † *Ibid.* p. 201. ‡ *Ibid.* p. 215.

been sometimes like to fail ; and yet I cannot say but the Lord, after all this trouble, holds me in health in the midst of all. If the Lord should give such support, and continue me years in this case, I have no reason to complain.”* On the next day he observed to a minister,—“ I think, brother, my case is a pretty fair demonstration of the immortality of the soul.” And afterwards,—“ Indeed I am patient, yet ‘ not I, but the grace of God in me.’ Not I, should ay be at hand. —Could I have believed that I could have had this pleasure and patience in this condition ! If ever I was distinct in my judgment and memory in my life, it was since he laid his hand on me. Glory to Him ! what shall I render to Him ? My bones are cutting through my skin, yet all my bones† are praising Him.”‡ After taking refreshment, he said,—“ I listened to unbelief since I came to this bed, and it had almost killed me ; but God rebuked it. I sought the victory by prayer, and God has given it. He is the hearer of prayer. I have not much more to do with death. Another messenger comes for me, a cough. Oh,—I am kindly dealt with. Hezekiah said, I am cut off ‘ from the residue of my years ;’

* Memoirs, p. 221. † In allusion probably to Psalm xxxv. 10.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 228.

but I will not say so. God is giving me this to make up the residue of my years. The Lord is even washing away my body, to let see that my spirit can live without it.”* “My body is wasting” (he remarked soon after) “like a piece of brae by a mighty current; and yet the power of God keeps me up.”† “How have I formerly fretted and repined at the hundredth part of the trouble I have on my body now. Here you see a man dying a monument of the glorious power of admirable astonishing grace!”—“Study the power of religion. It is the power and not a name that will give the comfort I find.”‡—He repeated to some ministers a former remark,—“What a demonstration has God given you and me of the immortality of the soul, by the vigour of my intellectuals, and the lively actings of my spirit after God and the things of God, now when my body is low and also pained.”§ Very little before his departure, he said,—“Though my body be sufficiently teased, yet my spirit is untouched.”||

This is but a small selection of the many striking declarations uttered and repeated in various forms by him through the last week of life; and in his dying moments, when an attendant said,—“I

* *Ibid.* p. 229, 230, † *Ibid.* p. 233. ‡ *Ibid.* p. 232.

§ *Ibid.* p. 234.

|| *Ibid.* p. 236.

hope you are encouraging yourself in the Lord," he "lifted up his hands, and clapped them," as a token of his joy, when the power of speech was gone.*

Had there been a temporary restoration of the frame inhabited by a spirit such as this, could it be rightly named *convalescence*? Or should we better describe it by the phrase which this dying believer twice used, when partial symptoms of recovery were felt,—a being "shipwrecked into health again?"† Is it not in truth, and sensibly, the convalescence of the spirit, to be thus casting off with triumph the death-struck form that encumbers it, "renovated day by day," while the "outward man" is "perishing," and the earthly "tabernacle dissolving" into dust? What is it but the earnest and the beginning of that immortal vigour, which no "fierce diseases" will assault, and no hidden decay can undermine? If—with submission to the Great Disposer—a Christian cannot but devoutly long for so blessed a departure, offering to beloved mourners some bright disclosures of "endless life,"—like morning twilight before a vernal sunrise,—while they gaze upon the image of ruin,—then is it too much for

* *Ibid.* p. 236.

† *Ibid.* p. 214, and p. 235.

him to be more “fervent in prayers,” “in labours more abundant,” though the short term of bodily health, or its uncertain renewal, “if by any means he may attain unto” that farewell blessedness; if the soul may be made perceptibly convalescent, while the body sinks in its last anguish, and give promise even in dissolution of a glorious and unfading health, “when Christ who is our life shall appear?”

XXVI.

ON ANNIVERSARIES, AS PECULIARLY PROMPT- ING US TO SERIOUS DEVOTION.

IN the earliest stages of life we can have but few private anniversaries. The year is comparatively unmarked by memory, and all its days are given to hope. Even the birth-day, which is early distinguished by parental notice, and the new year's day, which general feeling or habit observes, are rather viewed in connexion with the future than the past. But the memorable days which succeeding years will recal, must multiply for each of us as years revolve. There arises gradually a calendar of our individual history: and its anniversaries are far more affecting to ourselves, than most of those which the almanack presents.

The period of our attaining some desired suc-

cess ; of our entrance on some important employ ; of our embarking for some distant enterprise, or returning from it in safety ; of our solemnly assuming new duties ; of an endearing connexion commenced ; of other fond relations ensuing ; of some signal preservations, and of some poignant griefs, among which must be the successive dissolution of the tenderest ties of life ;—all these, in some minds, already augment the record ; and some of the last must, in almost every mind, continue to augment it, till our mortal records shall be closed. Perhaps there are those so awake both to grateful and to pensive recollections, that this unwritten register, amidst all the scenes of passing months, rarely fails to be reviewed ; so that few such anniversaries escape, without a degree of lively remembrance and appropriate feeling. To some others, a calendar thus inscribed, still noting the additional days which are signalised as life goes on, might be more profitable than many a treatise. It would be the briefest and most impressive sort of diary ; and not omitting the seasons which nature or Christianity celebrates, it would add a still increasing number, which must awaken, as powerfully, the serious thoughts and emotions of the individual. These emotions would indeed be dissimilar in kind and in degree ; but all anniversaries

have one very obvious and important office in common, that they most strikingly measure out and proclaim the lapse of time. It is true, that waning moons, and returning sabbaths, and every setting sun, and every passing hour, much oftener speak the same monitory language; but none of them with so distinct and powerful a voice. Anniversaries of events long past, which have therefore often recurred, already remind me how very large a portion of my mortal course is run; they stand like pyramids on the great plain of time, remote, yet still distinct, and shew us how far we have imperceptibly journeyed. But each, even at its *first* occurrence, marks and announces that a year of life is fled; that the material world on which I dwell, vast in *my* view, minute in the sight of Him who guides unnumbered worlds through the abyss of space, has fulfilled one more of its mighty revolutions. A thousand times a thousand leagues are but a small portion of its annual flight. And in the same swift period, this ever-moving spiritual world within, little in its attainments while linked with feebleness and death, but vast in the view of Him who comprehends its eternal prospects, has run through its myriads of successive thoughts and wishes, hopes and fears. But its circuits, if they may be called such, are not like those of the globe

on which I tread; the soul of man, as its hasty years revolve, should be compared rather to a world which, like the comets of our system, is rapidly receding from, or approximating to, the source of life and light. Either with each day and year the voluntary distance is widened, till it awfully plunge in the “blackness of darkness,”—or else the transforming attraction strengthens, and with each circuit of time the spirit draws nearer to the sun and centre of all worlds, soon to be immersed in that nearest brightness, where all its waste places shall blossom and bear fruit unto perfection, through an endless summer. How stupendous, how immeasurable the alternative!

Every greater division of time, such as these anniversary seasons indicate, should lead me, not only to meditate on my own fleeting life, but to “consider the years of many generations;” to mark with how sure and ceaseless a progression the secrets of eternity hasten to their development. Like the great movements of visible nature, like the travelling of sunbeams, and the courses of the stars, the destined course of ages is to us noiseless and insensible; but it has a silent grandeur, an equable irrepressible celerity, which is full of awe. “Yet a little while,” exclaimed an apostle, glancing through all the drama to its glorious consum-

mation,—“ yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry !” “ Behold I come quickly,” says the Lord and Inspirer of apostles, “ and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be.” That great crisis which is yet future, must one day be for ever past. “ At midnight there was a cry made,—Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to *meet* him !” Overwhelming summons ! Why does not the very forethought startle every drowsy energy of my immortal spirit ? Does it not rouse me by all that is solemn and all that is transporting ? Does it not hurry me, as with an angel’s hand, through the brief circuits of this dreaming mortality, and bear me, as on an angel’s wing, up into regions where none shall slumber ?

But the mind soon reverts to that great personal change which is most surely near ; and the impression of which is stronger, because it is much more definite. “ When a few years are come,” (said the patriarch, amidst his multiplied calamities,) “ then shall I go the way whence I shall not return !” He must often have made the same reflection afterwards, and, perhaps, with equal sensibility, in the midst of his restored enjoyments.

Every anniversary suggests to the thoughtful

mind the same reflection, and neither its antiquity or simplicity can impair its force. What distinction, what circumstance, so weighty, so affecting as this?—"I shall not return!"—When, towards the close of life, a voyage is undertaken to another hemisphere, to a shore whence the adventurer never expects to revisit the land of his fathers, if he be of a reflective and a tender spirit, what preparations does not this voyage demand; what objects does it not endear; what emotion does it not awaken!—But "when a few years are come," (may *every* Christian say,) when a few more anniversaries have glided by,—what a voyage is in prospect for *me*!—that vast and unknown voyage, whence, "till the times of the restitution of all things," I shall not return!—not return to the seasons of sacred retirement, or social devotion, those golden hours to fit me for the skies; not return to that abode where alone I can imitate my descended Lord in doing and in suffering, where he found labours enough to occupy an untiring zeal, and to engage, till the last moment of his sojourn, a celestial benevolence. He left a world replete with sorrows, (though, for his true disciples, he bore away their sting,) and I soon must leave it also. Then I cannot return,—to wipe away one tear of afflic-

tion,—to lead back one wanderer from the edge of ruin,—to guide and help, and comfort those who are most dear,—to soften the adversities of this life, or invite to the joys of another !

And shall I pass these quickly-circling years as if there were nothing to be done, to be subdued, to be acquired, to be imparted, before I launch my bark for that “ undiscovered country ?”

If the anniversaries which are calculated to affect us most deeply, should call forth sentiments at all resembling these, surely they should also impel us to seek, with unwonted earnestness, the communication of heavenly strength, that we may be enabled to pursue a course in some measure accordant with such feelings.

Contemplating thus the funeral procession of centuries, the hand's-breadth of our own earthly career, and the vast gulf of duration beyond, in which all finite periods are alike absorbed and lost, whither shall we look but to Him that enfolds the universe in his parental embrace, and comprehends, by his infinite Being, that eternity towards which we tend ?

If we solemnly desire to improve and consecrate the remnant of these fugitive years and days, whither shall we resort for the spirit of fortitude,

and wisdom, and fidelity, but to Him that worketh in us “to will and to do of his good pleasure;” even “according to the energy of his mighty power?”

XXVII.

ON THE CAPACITIES FOR WORSHIP IN HEAVEN.

THE frail constitution of our mortal nature sets narrow limits to spiritual knowledge and delight. The organization by which the soul now acts, may be compared to that little modern instrument of music which has its vibrations produced on glass. Touches, one degree too forcible, would break the material, and annihilate the melody. If the benignant influence of the natural sunbeams could be made so destructive by the mirrors of Archimedes, how much more might a concentration of spiritual glory, though conveying the most sublime and joyful impressions, disarrange and subvert our present mode of being.*

* See Daniel viii. 27, and x. 8, 15—17.

In the sublimest revelations made to prophets, as to Moses, when he beheld from the cleft of the rock the retiring glory of Jehovah: to Ezekiel, when he looked on the mystic wheels, the flashing cherubim, the sapphire throne, and the likeness of the glory of the Lord: and to the apostles Paul and John, in their heavenly visions;—we must suppose, either, (as is sometimes intimated,) that the body was *miraculously* sustained,* or, as St. Paul seems to conjecture, the connexion of the body and mind miraculously suspended.

The eminently pious and learned John Howe, a man of sound, calm, and capacious mind, left these words written in Latin on a blank page of his Bible:—

“December 26, 1689. This very morning I awoke, for the first time, from the following most delightful dream. An amazing emanation of celestial rays from the supreme seat of the Divine Majesty, seemed infused into my open and expanded breast.—Often since that memorable day, I have recalled, with a grateful mind, that signal pledge of the divine favour, and with reiterated pleasure have tasted of its sweetness.—But what I experienced of the same kind, by the admirable bounty

* Daniel x. 18, 19. Revelations i. 17.

of my God, and the transporting influence of the Sacred Spirit, on October 22, 1704, entirely exceeds all my resources of expression.”*

It is not distinctly stated in this very interesting memorial, whether, on the second occasion, as on the first, these beatific communications were received during sleep, but it seems implied ; and we may well believe, that this partial suspension of the animal functions was necessary to life, or at least to health, under such emotions, except a counter-acting miracle were wrought.--But when, from the dissoluble elements of our present frame, there shall be educed, by divine power, “a spiritual body,” we can conceive that it will be completely adapted to receive the full intenseness of those impressions which are needful to perfect felicity.

A poet who has attempted to describe that awful

* “Hoc ipso mane ex hujus modi somnio dulcissimo, primo evigilavi. Mirum scilicet a superno Divinæ Majestatis solio cœlestium radiorum profluvium in apertum meum hiansque pectus, infusum esse videbatur.—Sæpius ab illo insigni die, memorabile illud pignus divini favoris, grato animo recolui, atque dulcedinem ejusdem iterum atque iterum degustavi.—Quæ autem Octob. 22, 1704, id genus miranda, Dei mei benig-nitate, et suavissima Spiritus Sancti operatione percepi, omnium verborum quæ mihi suppetit copiam, plane superant.”

Howe's Life by Calamy, (prefixed to the folio edition of his works,) page 75.

period, when “many bodies of the saints, which slept, arose,”* represents their separate spirits, in the luminous vehicle of the intermediate state, descending, by divine command, to contemplate their own sepulchres. Rachel, the mother of patriarchs, attended by her guardian angel, approaches her lonely grave :—

“ And, as she spake, there streamed from forth the tomb,
 A soft-ascending vapour, like the dew
 That moistens roses, or the silvery mist
 Around a vernal bower. Her spirits gleam
 Brighten’d the vapour, as a setting sun
 Tinges the dewy west. She marks it wave,
 And soar, and sink, and fluctuate gently still
 Near her, and yet more near ; and venerates
 Creation’s changeful mysteries, profound
 In grandeur, in minuteness as profound ;
 Nor knows the fond affinity, nor deems
 How soon with that soft-floating ambient veil
 Thy voice, Almighty Saviour, shall involve
 Her own enraptur’d being. Yet she bends
 To watch its beauty with a strange delight,
 While the companion seraph eyes the scene
 Elate.

Then spake the all transforming voice :—
 She sank ;—she seem’d to melt in tears away ;
 Delicious tears ; as if her being stole
 Through some cool glade, and thence emerg’d in light,

* Matthew xxvii. 52.

Amidst the fragrance of a flowery shore.
 —She wakes ; she sees ; she feels herself enshrin'd
 In a new form, bright indestructible ;
 And with intenser blessedness adores
 Him that hath summon'd this access of joy
 From the sepulchral shade !”*

The achievements of modern chemistry facilitate and elevate our idea of that splendid change which may pass on the meanest relics of mortality. We had seen, it is granted, more wondrous transformations in nature ; so early indeed, and so often, that we forget to consider and admire them ; we knew that He, by whom “all things were made,” must have an energy “whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself ;” but when a *human* artificer, who confessedly knows nothing of the substance of that matter on which he operates, or of that mind by which he investigates its properties, obtains, by sure processes, a vital fluid from a coarse mineral ;† an inflammable air from water ;‡ and shining metals from the ashes of wood, or of sea-weeds ;§ philosophy thus seems, by her own advances, to cast more and more of practical scorn on her own incredulous question, “How are the dead raised up,

* Klopstock's *Messias*, XI. *Gesang*.—*imitated*.

† Oxygen gas.

‡ Hydrogen gas.

§ Potassium and sodium.

and with what body do they come?" Shall a frail and puny inquisitor of nature, whose hand and head must soon return to dust, effect changes thus surprising; and He that created the operative hand, the inquisitive eye, the inventive mind, shall he not shew us "greater works than these, that we may marvel?" Measure the probable excellence of the work by the infinite superiority of the Agent, and then conceive how *magnificently* he is likely to verify the prophetic words; "It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power."

Those who have had the most distressing experience of the action of corporal infirmity on the mind, will estimate most highly the value of such a glorious change; the delight of possessing a frame which may be as insusceptible of weariness or debility, as the tide in its flowing, or the moon in her orbit; unimpaired by the amplest communications of light and love, adequate to the noblest exercises of the intellect and the affections, and endlessly invigorated by their endless expansion.

And it would seem, that this very change which will impart to the compound being of the risen saints, a *physical* capacity for the highest spiritual enjoyment, may be the chief means of obviating that *moral* danger, which, in their present condition,

would arise from a far more exceeding and unvarying delight in the service of God.

The felicity to which that change will exalt its subjects, must essentially and supremely consist in what has been named the “beatific vision ;” or the vivid consciousness of a most intimate and gracious presence of Deity. And this, while it will necessarily be an unfailing source of the highest blessedness, must also be the exhaustless source of moral perfection. It will be so by a directly communicative and assimilating energy ;—“ We shall be like him,” (says an apostle,) “ for we shall see him as he is.”—“ I will behold thy face,” (says a prophet,) “ in righteousness ;” “ I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”

But, besides this, we cannot doubt that it will be so indirectly, by precluding all *self*-importance in the possession of that glorious likeness ; all pride in the enjoyment and perpetuity of the richest donation that can be made to a creature.

If we supposed the most devoted and humble of Christians to attain, in the present life, an uniform elevation of delight in worship, which approached to that of an angel,—yet *not* possessing, together with it, that vision of Deity which the mortal nature could not, without a miracle, endure, it is difficult to conceive that such a state of mind

could subsist, without generating a subtle pride and self-idolatry. A miraculous change in the whole constitution of the soul would be as needful to prevent this effect, as in that of the body to capacitate it for the vision which it could not naturally support. Accordingly we find that those who have been indulged in this life with the most rapturous devotional pleasures, have had frequent fluctuations and declensions of feeling; intended, as it appears, to recal the sense of entire dependence, and wither that fallacious self-sufficiency which was secretly nourished within them. But in that state of perfection, where “the pure in heart shall *see God*,” no such fluctuation can be supposed requisite. Doubtless, indeed, His efficacious grace will be, in heaven as on earth, the primary cause of holiness and happiness, and of their eternal stability. Both to glorified saints, and to the “elect angels,” this must be ever and alike essential; but the efficient cause being presupposed, nothing can be conceived instrumentally so powerful, to exclude, for ever, that blind and petty pride, which even the subjects of grace are conscious of on earth, as the perpetual and beatific vision of the majesty of heaven.

Imagine a holy being, endowed with the loftiest and most blissful attainments of which a created

spirit is capable, but consciously indebted for their fulness and perpetuation to the vision of God; beholding, continually and immediately, Him who is the sole fountain of these immortal honours;—will it be possible to imagine that being liable to the folly and sin of self-exaltation? And if it cannot be conceived of an angel, still less of a redeemed transgressor.

Were a good man of ardent feelings, to be introduced to that one of all his fellow-men, who was known to possess at once the most sublime wisdom, and the most heroic beneficence, he would surely forget self, for the moment, in his overflowing admiration; but, if this first of mortals were also his deliverer from prison and from death, a torrent of gratitude would yet more effectually extinguish all the sparks of pride. And, when a ransomed saint shall be for ever with his Lord, shall behold that Saviour who is the “effulgence of the Father’s glory, and express image of his essence,”* but who “divested himself,” becoming “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross,” and “obtained eternal redemption” for *him*,—will there be space on the altar of his heart for one particle of strange

* Macknight and Schleusner on Heb. i. 3, and Phil. ii. 7, 8. See also, on the former passage, Dr. J. P. Smith’s Scripture Testimony to the Messiah, vol. ii. page 677, and page 323, *note*.

and earthly fire? Will not the radiance of that divine love make it flame as a whole and unadulterated offering?

Surely, the delight of the redeemed in the adoration of the Redeemer, flowing from the presence of its transcendent object, will be guarded, if we may speak so, by its own excess; kept pure and unalloyed by its own redundancy. There is no reason, therefore, to apprehend, that the perfection and the joy of celestial worship will need, either on a physical or moral account, intermission or abatement.

We can indeed conceive, that, even in the heavenly state, happiness may be on the whole enhanced by a variation in its degrees; that the intervention of that "peace of God which passeth all understanding," as a pause and quiescence from the "fulness of joy," may augment the whole sum of felicity. Yet there is no proof of this; and the idea takes its rise from a contracted mortal experience.

Our impressions of admiration and delight are, in the present state, weakened by continuance or repetition. He who has long and daily looked on the Alps, or the ocean, is far less affected with these sentiments than he who contemplates either for the first time. But this well-known law be-

longs, perhaps, to our fallen and dying nature only. It may be one of the penalties inwrought in the fabric of such a nature, that its pleasing impressions should thus work their own decay.* The connexion between novelty and enjoyment may be expressly instituted for our earthly condition, in order to detach us from objects which we soon must quit, and which, themselves, “shall wax old like a garment, and as a vesture shall be changed.” We have no ground to conclude this connexion necessary, or permanent. We are sure it can have no place in the omniscient and infinite blessedness of Him who is from everlasting to everlasting. Therefore, by a perpetual *accession* of admiring joy, from the contemplation of the *same* perfect attributes and glorious works, created minds would most approximate to that kind of felicity which is proper to the “blessed God.”

Possibly, an angel, sent for the first time on a ministry of love to our earth, may view the Alps

* This idea is illustrated by a physiological remark since met with in the excellent introductory lecture to Dr. Kidd’s course of comparative anatomy. Oxford, 1824.—p. 55.—“We know also that habit renders nervous impressions dull; and hence the love of novelty.”—Here the decay of pleasing impressions is ascribed (at least in part) to the structure of the nervous system, i. e. to our *present bodily* constitution.

illuminated by the setting sun, with impressions (as to their rank in the scale of the divine works) like ours at first viewing a display of rich minerals and brilliant gems ;—yet has he one inexhaustible ever-growing advantage over mortal observers, if by each successive view his admiration and pleasure be, not enfeebled, but enlivened. We have only to suppose this very probable and delightful inversion of present experience, in a higher mode of being, in order to anticipate enjoyment that shall not be any way dependent on intermission or change, and to discover a new and constantly augmenting treasure in the gift of immortality.

And besides these considerations, there is every reason to expect that, in a future state of happiness, the blissful exercise of adoration will be concurrent with those active services, and those subordinate enjoyments, which may occupy, in boundless diversity and succession, “the whole family in the heavens.”

A divine of great note, and far removed from that class whose statements are most commonly accused of extravagance, has represented a sort of perpetual adoration as possible even in the present life. “Let no man think it is too much to require at the hands of men, at one and the self-same instant, both to attend their vocation and their

prayer. For the mind of man is a very agile and nimble substance ; and it is a wonderful thing to see how many things it will, at one moment, apply itself unto without any confusion or let. Look but upon the musician, while he is in his practice, he tunes his voice, fingers his instrument, reads his ditty, makes the note, observes time ; all these things *simul et semel*, at one and the same instant, without any distraction or impediment ; thus should men do in case of devotion, and in the common acts of our vocation let prayer bear a part.”*

And the celebrated Barrow has said nearly the same :—“ As bodily respiration, without intermission or impediment, doth concur with all our actions, so may that breathing of soul, which preserveth our spiritual life, and ventilateth that holy flame within us, well conspire with all other occupations.”†

The remarks of both these authors forcibly and instructively shew, how practicable and important it is to habituate ourselves to interpose mental devotion, in the frequent intervals and brief vacuities of other engagements ;‡ yet it is plain they

* Hales’ of Eton, (styled the ever-memorable :) *Golden Remains*, page 181. Sermon on Luke xviii. 1.

† *Select Sermons of Isaac Barrow*, vol. ii. p. 345.

‡ See this more particularly treated in XXIII. pp. 213. 223.

were not meant to be understood strictly, either in a philosophical or practical sense ; because many occupations claim, *while* we are pursuing them, the whole and fixed attention of the *mind*. And from this fact, that the occupations in which the intellect is most steadfastly and unremittingly engaged, can least admit such interposed prayer, we may draw an inference, humbling to the philosopher, and encouraging to the peasant ; namely, that the simple ordinary labours of mankind, in which the body, and not the mind, is chiefly concerned, are peculiarly favourable to that kind of devotion which is least artificial, least intermitted, and therefore most heavenly. The comparisons which those writers have used are most correctly adapted to illustrate that capacity of uninterrupted worship, which we expect will characterise a future state of perfection.

Devotion in heaven may neither impede, nor be impeded by, any mode of mental activity ; but may consist with all, be excited by all, be essential to all. The highest employments of the mind may offer no more “ distraction or impediment ” to a blissful adoration, than the involuntary functions of the body now present to thought. And this idea disarms the sarcasm of infidels on the perpetual worship of heaven, founded on their own

false pretence, that it involves a cessation of vigorous action and of intellectual progress. Is the play of the fountain obstructed by the iris that blends with and encircles it? Must the living fountains of mind spring up with a less majestic strength, or in forms and combinations of less variety and grandeur, because each drop shall give forth a ray, brighter and more ethereal than itself, to the eternal arch of praise?

Such are some of the thoughts of futurity which revelation invites the true worshipper to indulge; or, rather, it intimates prospects far above his powers of present conception; since even a distinguished apostle could say,—“It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” The first impression awakened by such prospects, in a mind deeply sensible to its frailty and demerit, is,—*Can* such an exaltation be designed for *me*? And the only substantial answer which I have discovered, is found in the memorable question of St. Paul;—“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not, *with him*, also, freely give us all things?” That truth, believed and realized, must silence all feelings which would limit the free and unmeasured munificence of our Father who is in heaven.

What, then, is the great practical impression to be sought from prospects like these, especially as

it regards our present exercises of devotion? They should surely abound in grateful, ardent hope, joyfully anticipating “the glory that shall be revealed.” But if, through temptations, or infirmities, our worship be still in these happiest qualities defective, let, at least, its *sincerity* be unquestionable, as the great pre-requisite to its becoming blissful and perfect hereafter. Let it be solemnly remembered, that, though we cannot now emulate the adoration of the heavenly world, yet “the hour *now is*, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth;” that is, with the unreserved, undissembled homage of the soul. Except there be in the heart a germ of real piety,—except it be, though weak and imperfect, yet genuine and incorrupt, rooted and growing, it were vain to hope that even the climate of heaven could expand that which is lifeless, or invest that which has no principle of growth, with beauty and fragrance.

NOTES.

NOTE A.

—— that he possessed no fixed confidence in the direct efficacy of prayer. Page 72.

THE eminent person referred to, is the late Dr. Thomas Brown, Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh. Since the first edition of this volume was published, I have been informed, by an esteemed correspondent, "that Dr. Brown did express, in private conversation, his conviction of the importance of prayer." My friend adds;—"I am sorry that I cannot ascertain whether he confined his views of the benefit of prayer to its natural and indirect effects on the mind of the offerer, or included, what forms, if not its essence, yet its chief value, its instrumentality in obtaining moral and spiritual good from the Divine Being."

That attendance on the professor's public lectures, to which I was myself indebted for many delightful hours, took place some years earlier than the interviews of my correspondent

or his friends : but it is gratifying to learn, that, either then or afterwards, Dr. Brown recognised the value of devotion ; and much more so, if we may infer, (what the same informant supposes to have been the fact,) that he in some sense believed the Christian revelation ; which gives to prayer an incomparably higher worth, and more definite objects, than it ever can derive from human theories.

This however affords a fit occasion to notice the evidence which exists, and which should not be overlooked in a volume like the present, that the higher kind of philosophy among the ancient heathen, fully affirmed the doctrine of divine influence, and distinctly recommended devotion. Dr. Price, in a large note to his dissertation on prayer,* has given several passages, illustrative of this, from their works, viz.—from Arrian's Epictetus, Hierocles, Plato, Seneca, Cicero, Maximus Tyrius, Marcus Antoninus, and Plutarch. If then the direct efficacy of prayer be questioned by any who profess to receive Jesus as a “ teacher sent from God,” we are reduced to the dilemma of supposing, either that writers among whom were the greatest and most honoured moralists of antiquity, had no trust in their own published opinions,—or else that they attained a higher hope by the light of nature, or the merely reflected light of revelation, as to divine aid, and the means of procuring it, than some are willing to accept from the plain encouragements and promises of one whose heavenly mission they acknowledge.

* Four Dissertations, pp. 302—8. Edit. 1768.

NOTE B.

Every good gift, and every perfect boon.

Page 75.

“ Πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον.”

ΙΑΚΩΒ. i. 17.

It is probable that there is some difference of meaning between δόσις and δῶρημα, (see Heisenius in Schleusner on the former word,) as well as between the epithets connected with them : and the variation adds a poetic grace to this metrical passage. But, whether δῶρημα, taken separately, mean (as that writer thinks) a *greater* kind of gift, or not, its epithet shews that the best of all gifts is here intended ; and δῶρημα, from its relation to δωρεαν, seems peculiarly adapted to intimate, that this best of gifts, divine influence on the soul, is purely free, or gratuitous. Thus understood, the passage most emphatically, though indirectly, reproves every mode and aspect of that pride, so natural to man, so apt to vegetate even in the “good ground,” which can “glory” in the gifts of God, whether spiritual or moral, intellectual, or relating to external things, “as though they had not been received.”

The comment of Estius on this passage, viewed in its reference to the origin of *spiritual* good, is excellent. Having made the supposition, that δόσις and δω'ρημα are to be distinguished, he says; "Ut illa ad naturam referatur, hoc ad gratiam; nam δω'ρημα est quod gratis datur. Quo pertinet et epithetum *perfecti*: nam gratia perficit naturam. Docet ergo Deum esse authorem omnis boni in nobis, sive naturalis, sive supernaturalis, sive in habitu consistat, sive in actu; præsertim cùm de peccatis ante fuerit locutus, quibus ex adverso bonæ actiones respondent. Egrediè hoc refellit Pelagium," &c.

Estius in Pol. Synops. in loc.

NOTE C.

—— an infinite *moral* perfection. Page 82.

—— a *part* of his wisdom and power. Page 83.

To some accurate thinkers, this, and similar language, may appear incorrect, or questionable. Locke has said, "Finite and Infinite, seem to me to be looked upon by the mind, as the *modes of quantity*, and to be attributed, primarily, only to those things which have parts:—and such are the ideas of space, duration, and number. When we apply to the first and Supreme Being, our idea of infinite, in our weak and narrow thoughts, we do it primarily in respect of his duration and ubiquity; and I think more figuratively to his power,

wisdom, and goodness, and other attributes which are properly inexhaustible and incomprehensible, &c. For, when we call them infinite, we have no other idea of this infinity, but what carries with it some reflection on, and intimation of that number, or extent of the acts or objects of God's power, wisdom and goodness, which can never be supposed so great, or so many, which these attributes will not always surmount and exceed;" &c. See the whole passage (which is here abridged) in Essay on the Human Understanding, Book II. chapter xvii. §. 1. But this great philosopher does not here *object* (at least not explicitly) to such a "figurative" application of the term infinite. Nor, indeed, does it seem to me possible, for us, wholly to abstract from the idea of quantity when we speak of moral and intellectual attributes, although the idea, thus applied, may be *purely analogical*. Locke himself, when he remarks in the above passage, that the divine power, wisdom, &c., are properly *inexhaustible* and *incomprehensible*, uses terms which as plainly take their rise from the idea of quantity, or measure, as does the term *infinite*. And the consideration, that this mode of conception and expression is so natural, will, I think, at least, suffice to justify the popular use of the terms to which this note refers, and of others which resemble them; even although, taken metaphysically, they should be liable to objection. When we speak of any perfection of Deity as *infinite*,—we mean, not that it is a quantity, possessing infinite *extension* and *divisibility*, but that its *exercise* is boundless and endless. When we speak of a *part* of the stability of divine power or truth, or a portion of the unsearchable strength of divine love, (pp. 93, 94,) we mean a portion of the exercise, or of the *acts*, and *manifestations* of either attribute.

But indeed it would be in *vain*, (as well as unwise for other reasons,) to attempt an exclusion of all phrases which are metaphysically improper or inadequate. The language of figure, or analogy, is made for man. It seems to be, in many cases, the only class of signs which he *can* use, and even when he would abstract the most carefully from what is material, he cannot wholly dispense with it. The terms which we *must* retain in speaking of the divine attributes, which the *inspired* writers continually use in relation to the Deity, lie open to the very same kind of comment. It may indeed, be thought, that Archbishop King, and his learned modern commentators, Dr. Copleston and Mr. Whately, have gone a degree too far in their views of the analogical nature of all those terms and ideas by which we describe the moral attributes of God ; on which point see the Quarterly Review (No. LI. pp. 88, 89 :) yet I apprehend thus much none can doubt, that they “are *all imperfect expressions when applied to God*, helping us only to form some notions, but those faint and inadequate, of his divine perfection.” (Archbishop King, as quoted by Dr. Copleston in his Inquiry on Necessity, &c. page 118.) And this remark, of course, extends to what are called the natural, as well as the moral attributes. Dr. Watts, in his Philosophical Essays, where a devout reverence for revealed truth and scriptural language appears in every page, states “the true notion of *omnipresence*,” in terms which, if correct, strikingly shew the analogical nature of our language in describing *that* attribute.—“This infinite consciousness and activity of God, which are his very self, have no measurable or unmeasurable relation either to body or space, as the parts of extension or quantity have to each other ; and, therefore, we say he is in *no place*, in strict and

philosophical language, though, in common speech, and in the language of scripture, which is suited to the bulk of mankind, God is said to fill all things, and to exist every where, because of his immediate consciousness," &c. Essay VI. §. 5.

The language, therefore, of all religious writings, and, I should suppose, even of philosophical theology, must be exposed, in some degree, to this imputation of inaccuracy. As it respects "omnipresence," for example, the second paper of this volume would in some sense be so by its very *title*; much more by several parts of its contents.

It may be further remarked, by the way, that, if the above notion of omnipresence be just, (in which Hartley fully concurs, when he writes, "We cannot discover any relation which space or place bears to the divine existence," *Observations on Man*, Part. II. chapter i, Propos. 7. See, also, Doddridge's *Lectures*, Propos. 34, Scholium 2.) then it would appear, that the term *infinite* is applied as improperly or "figuratively," to the "duration and ubiquity," (i. e. eternity and omnipresence,) of God, as to other attributes, notwithstanding Mr. Locke's distinction; *if* it involve (as he supposes,) the idea of *quantity*,* to which, according to those authors, the divine *existence* has *no* relation. Yet this term is not wholly discarded by the most recent and accurate theologians: it is useful and expressive; and, to say that it is but analogical, is only to say what may equally be said respecting a great portion of the other language of Christian divines, and of the Scriptures.

But, that these thoughts may not be unapplied to a prac-

* But see Note D, page 303.

tical use, which, it is conceived, directly arises from them, (and which, if well founded, may of itself excuse their having been pursued at some length,) I conclude by suggesting, that the great proportion of figure, and especially analogical figure, which enters necessarily into the very formation of human thought and language, very much weakens the objection made against the truth of the Old Testament, on account of what may be termed its rude and popular, and inaccurate way of representing great phenomena and sublime truths, and particularly on account of those descriptions of the Deity and the divine acts, where the analogy is taken from the *human body*.

A polished taste is very susceptible, (and perhaps may, even *critically* speaking, be *over-sensitive*,) as to the difference between figures which are thought appropriate and refined, and such as are felt to be quite the reverse. But if we grant that *all* analogical expressions are imperfect; and extremely so, in reference to what is divine; then the most splendid and the most undignified which Scripture offers, are not to be *contrasted*, but only compared; as being utensils of the same kind, taken from different parts of that same narrow range of types or signs for indicating truth to man, of which alone his present knowledge admits the use.

Mankind must be taught the greatest truths through the exhibition of *some* kind of *images*; they may fancy, at a certain stage of refinement, that these images, if they were really set forth by the Divine Teacher, would needs all have been (as it were) of pure crystal, or even of lambent flame; and in no instance of homely wood, or earth, or miry clay; forgetting that there would be *still* an inconceivable *difference*, not only between the meanest, but the most brilliant images

that could be offered to the human faculties, and the reality of the divine things denoted by them.

An ancient geometer, demonstrating profound and beautiful theorems, may have chosen sometimes to trace his diagrams on the mud of the Nile, or in the sweepings of his lecture-room; we can suppose a young student, who looked on them, to say,—If these theorems had been from a master's hand, and true and important in themselves, they would not have been drawn thus meanly;—we can also suppose the philosopher to ask him, with scorn,—How much more mathematical truth or beauty would there have been, had they been traced on papyrus, or in gold-dust?

The topic, indeed, admits of several *other* arguments; but this one, I think, is not inconsiderable: it might, if the present note had not exceeded its designed limits, be more fully developed; and perhaps, also, more variously applied, in defence of scriptural representations.

NOTE D.

—— works which are, in some sense, notwithstanding their magnificence, *finite*.

Page 89.

—— even though the multitude of intelligent or sentient beings should be *not* infinite, which, understanding that word in the sense of ever-growing, or increasing *without end*, we can be no way certain that it *will* not be.

Page 114.

MATTER, as to its extension, must be finite, unless we would excuse a vacuum; it is also contradictory to speak of an actually existing infinite number. But in admitting the infinite divisibility of matter, which is as demonstrable as a vacuum, we admit an endless series of parts in the smallest known body; which, I apprehend, sufficiently shews, that the notion of a *never-ending multiplication* of bodies is not contradictory. The reflection, trite as it is, should not here be omitted, how ill it becomes *us* rashly to deny what is above reason, while infinitude meets and confounds us in all things, “from the least to the greatest,” as much in contemplating an atom as the universe; and, while mysteries, not less inscrutable, attach to the existence of *body*, than to that of *spirit*. The words of Locke are remarkable:—“I would

fain have instanced* any thing in our notion of [spirit, more perplexed, or nearer a contradiction, than the very notion of body includes in it; the divisibility *in infinitum* of any finite extension, involving us, whether we grant or deny it, in consequences impossible to be explicated or made consistent." (Essay, Book II. chapter xxiii. §. 31. See, also, the last of Howe's Letters on the Trinity; in works, vol. ii. page 605, folio edition.)

But to return to the direct subject of this note;—the opinion that the material worlds, or that organized beings, are infinite in multitude, although it has been controverted, is supported by some eminent writers. Dr. Edmund Halley (to whose care Newton committed the publication of his *Principia*) adduces *astronomical* arguments in favour of the supposition, that "the number of stars is infinite, and the system without bounds." (Quoted in Bonnycastle's Introduction, page 308.) The conclusiveness of these arguments is much doubted; indeed the terms of the supposition appear contradictory, except infinite was meant to be used in the sense of *endlessly increasing*.

Dr. Hartley, however, in more general terms, and on metaphysical grounds, seems to suppose *more* than this—"Though no finite being can comprehend more than the finite effects of power and knowledge; nay, though to suppose infinite effects, i. e. an infinite universe, is thought by some to involve a contradiction, to be the same thing as supposing an actually infinite number; yet it appears to me, that the other branch of the dilemma repels us with the greatest force. To suppose a finite universe, is to suppose a

* (i. e. by the objector.)

stop where the mind cannot rest ; we shall always ask for a cause of his finiteness, and, not finding any, reject the supposition.——As to the foregoing objection to the infinity of the universe, we may observe, that it arises merely from the finiteness of our comprehensions. We can have no conception of any thing infinite, nor of the possibility that any other being, conceived by us, can conceive this, &c. But all this vanishes when we come to consider, that there actually is, that there necessarily must be, an Infinite Being. This Being may conceive his own infinite works, and he alone can do it. His own infinite nature, which we cannot but admit, is as much above conception, as the infinity of his works." (Observations on Man, vol. ii. chap. i. Propos. 3.)

It is not to be inferred, from my having connected with this supposition of an infinity (i. e. endless multiplication) of sentient beings, the fact of the vast extension of the material universe, as *corroborating* its probability, (at page 116,) that I imagine extension *necessary* to the supposition. Even did we know that a created spirit never can or must act, except in connexion with matter, it would be no whit the less conceivable, that the power who unites animation and all vital functions with microscopic portions of matter, may unite the highest faculties of a spirit with an organization equally minute, or indefinitely more so. Why may it not be *one* among the countless triumphs of omnipotent skill, to give to some of the noblest and happiest intelligences, bodies whose structure is the more exquisite in proportion as their *exility* is more wonderful? Nothing, I think, but our analogical thoughts and expressions, such as greatness, sublimity, &c. so habitually applied to *mind*, would make this idea appear extravagant. Wherefore should not subtilty be as admirably

stupendous as magnitude, and the Divine Artificer be more glorified, and the creature more perfect and refined, when the mass of organized matter were in the *inverse* ratio (and consequently the wonderfulness of its fabric in a *direct* ratio), to the excellence and dignity of the actuating Spirit?—But, moreover, it is argued by some metaphysicians, that spirits have “no measurable relation to place,” and “do not require any space to possess; and if there be any sort of separate spirits which are not united to matter, they are, most properly, no where in strict philosophy.” (Dr. Isaac Watts, on the place and motion of Spirits; Philosophical Essay, VI. §. 4. See, also, Doddridge’s Lectures, proposition 84.)

This, which however incomprehensible by us, cannot, I apprehend, be disproved, would at once exclude all imagined necessary *dependence* of created existence on *extension*.—Nor can these be justly deemed trifling or over-curious speculations, if they any way conduce to shew how unsearchably infinite are the resources of Divine power and goodness. He who disbelieves a plurality of worlds, or he who even denies the existence of matter, has not advanced one step towards demonstrating, that God will not create an infinity of happy spirits.

Will it be said in reference to these last remarks,—Why, therefore, speak of “the incalculable magnitude of creation” as “*auxiliary* to faith, and of their being “ample *room* for a preponderance of happiness?” &c. pp. 127, 128. I answer, —Because the fact and the contemplation of such magnitude, greatly promote our belief that there *is* an utterly inconceivable multitude of sentient beings: nay, further, render it next to incredible that there is *not*. Who does not feel the high probability, that, wherever material worlds and systems are,

these are populous with organized and intelligent creatures? Who does not perceive the exceeding improbability of the *contrary* supposition? If a mariner, with his telescope, ascend the first cliff of an unexplored coast, and find it to be a very small islet, on which no traces whatever of life are visible, yet is he no way entitled to infer, that no life is there; for, if not men, yet multitudes of minute animals, may be variously concealed, or invisible; but if, on the contrary, he find a vast tract before him, and observe with his glass the smoke which seems to rise from distant cities, how will you persuade him that there is *not* a great population?

While seeking for opinions on this question, I was led to refer to a critique, from the pen of a highly original essayist, on "Chalmers's Discourses." (*Eclectic Review*, 1817, pp. 206, 354, 466.) That writer very eloquently expatiates on the "practical infiniteness" of the universe, and the glory of its Creator, pp. 216, 217. I have adverted to this article of criticism, (which it were well if its author would modify and enlarge as a separate essay,) partly for the purpose of stating that I suspect myself to have been unconsciously indebted to it for some of the thoughts in No. XIII.: to which this note refers.

The "wide prevalence of evil" is in that critique powerfully contended against; and "the immensity of the intelligent creation" is adduced as a theory yielding ground for the assurance, that the proportion of good among the creatures of the Almighty, may all but infinitely transcend that of evil. pp. 470, 471.

It is true, these topics are there treated in a different manner, and, as might be expected, with much more bold and excursive amplification; yet I suspect the impression made

by them, though at an interval of some years, may have originated the humbler thoughts which are here offered. It seems the part of honesty to point out this when discovered, although it may need little or no excuse: for what ordinary writer can hope to escape (or, indeed, could afford to dispense with) the unconscious borrowing of thoughts and language? How can he fail to be—with all due contempt for plagiarism—the unwitting editor of other men's notions? And, in proportion as an indistinct memory precludes temptation to literary theft, it augments the hazard of these his unperceived appropriations or *adhesions*. He presents them in new combinations, wholly ignorant of their original sources; and it is very rarely that they can, with any probability, be retraced; but, sooner or later, they have been drawn from the public stock. They are like old fragments of plate brought into the goldsmith's store, melted up and re-produced in shapes somewhat novel; though even their new form will be influenced by the fashion of the age, or the style of some leading artist whom the age applauds. It were all well if no baser metals came into the amalgam. In other words, it were well if we could borrow thoughts from the great minds of our own and other times, rather than from the great common-place book of ordinary literature. In the one case, we may hope for a good portion of ore from the vein; in the other, we get but the worn currency which "may be slave to thousands."

On the chief topic of this note, I have rather wished to adduce opinions than decide on them. But it may be remarked, that true or *proper* infinity appears to be justly viewed as having *no relation* to quantity; i. e. to space, number, or duration. Fenelon asserts, "L'infini ne peut jamais

être ni successif ni divisible.” (Tr. de l’Exist. de Dieu, §. 75, pp. 173, 174, et 281—341;) and Watts has the position, “No actual infinite can consist of finite parts.” (Ontolog. c. 17.) Locke, on the other hand, who appears to regard space and duration as real and *infinite*, (Essay, Book 2, c. 15. §. 20, and c. 15, §. 2, 3,) speaks of time and place as “portions of those infinite quantities,”—“distinguishable portions of those infinite abysses of space and duration,” &c. (Book 2, c. 15, §. 5, 6, 7; and see the quotations in Note C above, pp. 292—296.) Yet it is demonstrated, that simple infinity excludes all bounds, and can neither be augmented nor diminished. (See Fenelon, *ubi supra*.) How far, therefore this proper infinity can be ascribed to space or duration, (considered as divisible and successive, or as any thing else than the *divine existence itself*;) I leave to stronger minds to solve.

It is remarkable, that our idea of infinite, and use of the term, in reference to number or magnitude, and to division of parts, has something in it directly *contrary* to that notion of simple infinity. Instead of supposing “all addition impossible,” it means, to use the words of Locke, “number *always to be added*,” or “*endless addibility*.” (Essay, Book II. c. xxix. §. 16.) When we make a supposition therefore, of “infinite multitude,” or “infinite parts,”) we mean something essentially different from (and in one respect, contrary to) the simple infinity which must be ascribed to Deity; for we mean *future* endless augmentation of number; at least, this is our only clear idea. We cannot *intelligibly* to ourselves hold the opinion, that there actually *is*, or *has been*, “an infinite multitude of sentient beings;” but it may be quite intelligibly held, that there *will* be an endless (and in *that* sense *infinite*) multiplication of such; or, in other words, that

the multitude of sentient beings *to be* created, is absolutely never ending. This is the improper sense of infinite; is it not, however, sanctioned by philosophers in their phrase,—infinite divisibility?

It involves the idea of endless succession and futurity. It is infinite, if we may so speak, always in the *future tense*; and it illustrates the near and wonderful relation which philosophers have noticed between the ideas of time and space, or duration and expansion. For this sense of infinite coincides with one scriptural and theological use of the word *eternal*, as describing the future endless life promised to Christians; that is, an endless future accession of duration, an “eternity *à parte post*,” (which expression, also, Fenelon affirms, is improper). Of the Deity, it may be said, He is eternal; or, rather, He *is*; “Cette existence infinie est toujours toute entière.”—“En lui rien ne dure, parceque rien ne passe: tout est fixé: tout est à la fois: tout est immobile.” (Ibid. p^{tie} 2^e p. 327.) Of creatures, it can never be said, here or hereafter, they *are* eternal, but only they *shall* exist without end.* It is in a like sense only that I can *conceive* of “infinite multitude;” though I would not, therefore, positively deny that it can exist in an actual or present sense, (however incomprehensible,) as Dr. Hartley thinks it may. But it is important to remark, that even the intelligible idea of it above proposed, gives scope for an *endlessly augmenting* excess of good over evil, as rapid as the progressive possibilities of things (which may be constantly and immensely changing

* Dr. Bently calls this an existence “*potentially* infinite,” and discusses the nature of such infinitude. (See his Sixth Sermon at Boyle’s Lecture, p. 21. edit. 1692.)

towards the better) can admit, and as boundless as a never-ending duration can receive. Well, however, did the excellent Watts acknowledge—"We are finite creatures, and we soon lose ourselves among infinites." Most happy those who can join in the anticipation with which he devoutly and beautifully closes the preface to his Philosophical Essays: "We shall change this dusky region for a brighter. Farewell, books, and disputes, and dark notions, and lame hypotheses! We enter into the state of unbodied minds; we are surrounded with the light of paradise; we shall see ourselves and our fellow-spirits; there we shall commence our happy immortality in those pure and exquisite delights of unerring contemplation, and undecaying love."

NOTE E.

—— which *assures* us of the moral perfection of God.

Page 118.

"HERE." says Hartley, (Observations on Man, Part II. chapter i. Proposition 4.) "revelation comes in aid of reason, and affords inexpressible satisfaction to all earnest and well-disposed persons, even in this age, after natural philosophy, and the knowledge of natural religion, have been so far advanced. In the early ages of the world, divine revelation must have been almost the only influencing evidence of the moral attributes of God." To which we may add,—So must

it, at least to the great mass of mankind, still *continue* to be. We do not here discuss the real effects which the study of natural religion and philosophy (apart from revelation) may have produced on the creed of the highly cultivated few; but it is clear, that, with respect to the many, there can have been no material accession of "influencing evidence" from these sources.

NOTE F.

The Lord of the unerring bow, &c. Page 185.

It may be proper to notice, that these quotations are not (as their connection would seem to intimate) from Homer, or his translators; but from the brilliant descriptive stanzas of a modern poet.

What Christian, who can feel the power and fascination of that poet's genius, but mourns that it was not consecrated, like Milton's, to heavenly truth and immortal hope:—and asks, as he contemplates the fine susceptibility which that mind has evinced, of all which is fair and glorious,—Why should it be yet too late?—It is true, the past is painfully irrevocable. If the Horatian warning, "*Nescit vox missa reverti*," be important in its own critical sense, how incomparably more so in a moral and Christian application.—Yet few have been more distinguished as ardent and efficient

friends to the best cause, than some who, in after life, had to look back, with deep compunction, on the words, if not writings, of other years.*

I know no fact, and no sentiments, more worthy to be considered, by all who have hitherto yielded up superior faculties and feelings to religious and moral scepticism, than the changed views and last reflections of the French poet and philosopher, De La Harpe; of which I subjoin a few extracts, and a translation: because they are too valuable to be allowably concealed from *any* reader by the want of a version: while the beauty of the original disinclines me to withhold that from *other* readers. He thus writes of himself:—

“ Un homme a été assez malheureux pour oublier pendant quarante ans, la loi d'un Dieu dont il reconnaissait l'existence, et pour blasphémer la religion sainte que ce Dieu est venu lui-même apporter aux hommes. Ce même Dieu, par un miracle de sa grâce, le touche en un moment par la lecture des livres saints, qu'il avait toujours négligée; Dieu éclaire son esprit et parle à son cœur. En songeant à la justice de Dieu, il est prêt à douter de sa miséricorde;

* The first edition of this work (and of the above note) was printed in the closing days of 1823. Less than four months afterwards,* the grave received the mortal remains of the poet, smitten in his prime of manhood, and amidst a new career of fame.—If it be but a truism which that grave repeats, it is nevertheless terrible and much forgotten;—He who writes, or speaks, what he will one day “wish to blot,” may be cut off—by a stroke already impending—from every means of reparation to mankind; and too probably, by its suddenness, from reconciliation with his Maker!

* Lord Byron died April 19, 1824.

mais l'Evangile lui répond par la voix d'un de ses apôtres : *Dieu a tant aimé les hommes, qu'il leur a envoyé son fils, et l'a livré à la mort pour eux.* C'est alors que le pécheur pénitent comprend cet ineffable mystère ; sa raison orgueilleuse et aveugle l'avait rejeté ; son cœur *contrit et humilié* le sent profondément. Il croit, parcequ'il aime ; il croit, parcequ'il est reconnoissant ; il croit, parcequ'il voit toute la bonté du Créateur, proportionnée aux misères de la créature. O mon Dieu ! tous vos mystères sont des mystères d'amour, et c'est pour cela qu'ils sont divins ! L'homme n'inventerait pas ainsi : cela est trop au dessus de lui ; un Dieu seul a pu nous le dire, parcequ'un Dieu seul a pu le faire. Oh mon Dieu ! je sais bien que ces vérités que j'écris sont la condamnation de ma vie entière. C'est vous qui me les avez apprises, et je les avais oubliées si long-temps, et je me croyais éclairé ! Tel est donc l'aveuglement des passions, que je ne comprenais pas même ce qui me paraît aujourd'hui si simple et si clair ! Vous avez daigné m'ouvrir les yeux en un moment. Achevez, oh mon Dieu ! Après m'avoir fait connaître mes fautes, apprenez-moi à les réparer autant qu'il est en moi ; donnez-m'en le temps et les moyens si tel est l'ordre de vos miséricordes, et que l'aveu que je fais ici puisse être utile à mes frères, dont aucun n'a été un aussi grand pécheur que moi."

(De La Harpe.—"Fragmens d'une Apologie de la Religion Chrétienne," appended to his "Lycée, or Cours de Littérature," pp. 329 and 332, duod. edit. 1815.)

"A human being was so unhappy, as to forget, through forty years, the law of a God whose existence he recognized, and to blaspheme that holy religion which this God himself was manifested to present to men. This same God, by a

miracle of his grace, touches him instantaneously, in the perusal of those sacred books which he had always before neglected. God illuminating his mind, and speaks to his heart. In thinking of the justice of the Deity, he is at first ready to doubt of his compassion: but the 'gospel answers him by the voice of an apostle 'God so loved the world,' that 'He spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all.'—It is then that the penitent sinner apprehends this ineffable mystery. His proud and blind reason had rejected it: 'his *humble and contrite*' heart profoundly feels it. He believes, because he loves:—because he is grateful;—because he sees all the goodness of the Creator, proportioned to the miseries of the creature. Oh my God, all thy mysteries are mysteries of love, and therefore are they indeed divine! Man would not thus invent: it is God alone who could thus speak, because it is He alone who could thus act.
 Oh, my God, I know too well that the truths which I now write form the condemnation of my entire life. Thou didst instruct me in them; and I forgot them so long, yet imagined myself enlightened. Such is the blindness produced by passions, that I did not even understand what now appears to me so simple and so clear! Thou hast deigned to open mine eyes in a moment! Perfect thy work, oh my God! since thou hast given me the knowledge of my offences, teach me, as much as in me lies, to repair and to correct them; grant me time and means for this, if such be the order of thy mercies, and let the avowal which I here make be useful to my brethren,* of whom none has been so great a sinner as myself."

* He here refers to the French literati and men of science with whom he was associated.

POSTSCRIPT

TO NOTE F.

(FIRST ADDED IN THE SECOND EDITION.)

THE foregoing note was designed to be applicable to sceptical and immoral writers generally; and, should it come under the eye of such, which is the less unlikely on account of the correspondence now appended to it, their thoughtful perusal of the *quotation* which it offers, may, without vanity, be asked.

It was however chiefly prompted by a peculiar interest respecting the character and genius of the late Lord Byron, long since excited in my mind by his writings, and much heightened for the last two years, by a private correspondence with him on a religious topic which occurred toward the close of 1821.

There could not, indeed, be the slightest expectation, that a volume so little known as this, and on such a class of subjects, would be seen by Lord Byron, except expressly addressed to his residence; but I had a half-formed intention (induced by the tenour of the correspondence referred to) of so presenting it to his notice. This was checked, partly by the distant, uncertain, and agitating scenes of war, in which

the last months of his life were spent, and not less by the opinion that any thing indirectly aimed at himself, in print, and in a devotional publication, might prove repulsive, and create a personal prejudice adverse to the past or future influence of any private communication. Now that his memorable career has been so suddenly terminated, and all future opportunities are awfully precluded, this hesitation is matter of regret; and I can only recur to the presumed inefficacy or ill effect of the attempt, as alleviating that regret,—not as a sufficient reason for the omission.

During Lord Byron's life, his letter, and that which occasioned it, were, and still would have been, only shewn to a few friends, and that in strict confidence; but my impression, since his decease, that it has now become a duty to publish them, is confirmed by some of those friends.

The reasons which prevail with me to do so, as well as some objections which those reasons overweigh, will be best understood after the perusal of the copies subjoined.

TO
THE RIGHT HONOURABLE
LORD BYRON,
PISA.

Frome, Somerset, November 21, 1821.

MY LORD,

MORE than two years since, a lovely and beloved wife was taken from me, by lingering disease, after a very short union. She possessed unvarying gentleness and fortitude, and a piety so retiring as rarely to disclose itself in words, but so influential, as to produce uniform benevolence of conduct. In the last hour of life, after a farewell look on a lately born and only infant, for whom she had evinced inexpressible affection, her last whispers were, "God's happiness!..... God's happiness!"* Since the second anniversary of her

* It has been suggested to me, that this expression may possibly, to me readers, appear obscure. The ideas which it solemnly conveyed to myself, and which I believe to have been in the mind of the dying Christian who uttered it, are such as

decease, I have read some papers, which no one had seen during her life, and which contain her most secret thoughts. I am induced to communicate to your Lordship a passage from these papers, which, there is no doubt, refers to yourself; as I have more than once heard the writer mention your agility on the rocks at Hastings.

“Oh, my God, I take encouragement from the assurance of thy word, to pray to Thee in behalf of one for whom I have lately been much interested.* May the person to whom I allude, (and who is now, we fear, as much distinguished for his neglect of Thee as for the transcendent talents Thou hast bestowed on him,) be awakened to a sense of his own danger,

these :—“ I am early summoned to quit all that happiness which consists in the exercise of affection towards those whom I tenderly love, and in the enjoyment of theirs ; but,—oh, blissful consolation !—I am only called hence to that infinitely superior happiness ‘ which God hath prepared for them that love him,’ and indeed to the participation of his *own* happiness, which is perfect and eternal !”

* Such a Christian interest for Lord Byron’s character, created by the sublime and powerful talents committed to him, and discovered in his works, was doubtless shared by many ; but, it may be believed, that comparatively few were led by it, like the writer of this prayer, to special intercession for an individual with whom they had not even the slight connexion of acquaintance. How excellent would be the habit, so recommended to us by scriptural examples, of giving to benevolent wishes, which may now pass silently, and often slightly, through the mind, the more fixed impress and impulse of mental petition !

and led to seek that peace of mind in a proper sense of religion, which he has found this world's enjoyments unable to procure ! Do Thou grant that his future example may be productive of far more extensive benefit than his past conduct and writings have been of evil ; and may the Sun of Righteousness, which, we trust, will, at some future period, arise on him, be bright in proportion to the darkness of those clouds which guilt has raised around him, and the balm, which it bestows, healing and soothing in proportion to the keenness of that agony which the punishment of his vices has inflicted on him ! May the hope that the sincerity of my own efforts for the attainment of holiness, and the approval of my own love to the great Author of religion, will render this prayer, and every other for the welfare of mankind, more efficacious,—cheer me in the path of duty ; but, let me not forget, that, while we are permitted to animate ourselves to exertion, by every innocent motive, these are but the lesser streams which may serve to increase the current, but which, deprived of the grand fountain of good, (a deep conviction of inborn sin, and firm belief in the efficacy of Christ's death for the salvation of those who trust in him, and really seek to serve him,) would soon dry up, and leave us as barren of every virtue as before."

" July 31, 1814.

" Hastings."

There is nothing, my Lord, in this extract, which, in a literary sense, can *at all* interest you ; but it may, perhaps, appear to you worthy of reflection, how deep and expansive a concern for the happiness of others the Christian faith can

awaken in the midst of youth and prosperity. Here is nothing poetical and splendid, as in the expostulatory homage of M. Delamartine; but here is the *sublime*, my Lord; for this intercession was offered, on your account, to the supreme *Source* of happiness. It sprang from a faith more *confirmed* than that of the French poet; and from a charity which, in combination with faith, shewed its power unimpaired amidst the languors and pains of approaching dissolution. I will hope that a prayer, which, I am sure, was deeply sincere, may not be always unavailing.

It would add *nothing*, my Lord, to the fame with which your genius has surrounded you, for an unknown and obscure individual to express his admiration of it. I had rather be numbered with those who wish and pray, that "wisdom from above," and "peace," and "joy," may enter such a mind.

THE ANSWER.

Pisa, December 8, 1821.

SIR,

I HAVE received your letter. I need not say, that the extract which it contains has affected me, because it would imply a want of all feeling to have read it with indifference. Though I am not quite *sure* that it was intended by the writer for *me*, yet the date, the place where it was written, with some other circumstances which you mention, render the allusion pro-

bable. But, for whomever it was meant, I have read it with all the pleasure which can arise from so melancholy a topic. I say *pleasure*—because your brief and simple picture of the life and demeanour of the excellent person whom I trust you will again meet, cannot be contemplated without the admiration due to her virtues, and her pure and unpretending piety. Her last moments were particularly striking; and I do not know, that, in the course of reading the story of mankind, and still less in my observations upon the existing portion, I ever met with any thing so unostentatiously beautiful.—Indisputably, the firm believers in the gospel have a great advantage over all others,—for this simple reason, that if true, they will have their reward hereafter, and if there be no hereafter, they can be but with the infidel in his eternal sleep, having had the assistance of an exalted hope, through life, without subsequent disappointment, since (at the worst for them) “out of nothing, nothing can arise,” not even sorrow. But a man’s creed does not depend upon *himself*; *who* can say, I *will* believe,—this,—that,—or the other? and least of all, that which he least can comprehend. I have, however, observed, that those who have begun life with extreme faith, have in the end greatly narrowed it, as Chillingworth, Clarke, (who ended as an Arian,) Bayle, and Gibbon, (once a Catholic,) and some others; while on the other hand, nothing is more common than for the early sceptic to end in a firm belief, like Maupertuis, and Henry Kirke White.

But my business is to acknowledge your letter, and not to make a dissertation. I am obliged to you for your good wishes, and more than obliged by the extract from the papers of the beloved object whose qualities you have so well

described in a few words. I can assure you that all the fame which ever cheated Humanity into higher notions of its own importance, would never weigh in my mind against the pure and pious interest which a virtuous being may be pleased to take in my welfare. In this point of view I would not exchange the prayer of the deceased in my behalf, for the united glory of Homer, Cæsar, and Napoleon, could such be accumulated upon a living head. Do me at least the justice to suppose that

“*Video meliora proboque;*”

however the “*Deteriora sequo*” may have been applied to my conduct.

I have the honour to be,

Your obliged and obedient Servant,

BYRON.

P.S. I do not know that I am addressing a clergyman: but I presume that you will not be affronted by the mistake (if it is one) on the address of this letter. One who has so well explained, and deeply felt, the doctrines of religion, will excuse the error which led me to believe him its minister.

To some persons it will of course be entirely superfluous to suggest the chief reflections which this letter awakens; and yet, for the sake of others, it appears right not to lay it, uncommented upon, before the public.

Nothing in it will be more obvious or more important, in the view of a thinking reader, than the full concession of this powerful mind as to the high value of Christian faith; the "exalted hope, through life," which it is exclusively adapted to confer on its genuine possessors. It is assumed by the noble writer, as an agreed fact, that modern infidels have no better prospect to offer us than that of "eternal sleep." And it is too apparent, from intimations in his own, and broader statements in other works, that the reigning unbelief of our day is of this lowest and most hopeless kind. Imagination and physical science seem to have contended which shall lend itself most effectively to the wretched and ignoble task of persuading men that they are altogether mortal. Poetry and physiology have been employed to present visions of materialism and annihilation, which cannot but involve a creed nearly equivalent to atheism.

The schemes of the older deists, and of the modern theophilanthropists, which, while excluding revelation, professedly upheld the doctrine of a future state, are to be placed but one very short step in the scale of moral opinions below that German neology or anti-supernaturalism, which assumes the name of Christian; and those schemes were exalted when compared with the degrading and demoralizing theory which modern infidels propose.

But whatever superiority those better tenets possessed, it may be doubted whether they have often been firmly held even by the speculatists who taught them. Dr. Young, who was a cotemporary with some of the chief deistical writers of the last century, has said in one of his well-known prefaces, "from my being accidentally privy to the sentiments of some particular persons, I have been long persuaded

that most, if not all, our infidels (whatever name they take, and whatever scheme, for argument's sake, and to keep themselves in countenance, they patronise) are supported in their deplorable error, by some doubt of their *immortality* at the bottom."

From the mode of conducting this evil cause both in France and England, since his time, we have ground to conclude that this most ruinous kind of unbelief has infected a greater proportion than heretofore of those who reject or do not embrace Christianity. There are still, I trust, not a few, who adhere, in their *wishes* as well as their professions, to a more elevated and pure philosophy; but it seems probable that even these secretly fluctuate from the better to the worse, as lower inclinations predominate. On the other hand, while it is impossible not to fear, from the whole cast of his writings and conduct, that the mind of Lord Byron often yielded itself to the most debasing views of the human nature and destiny, I cannot but believe that it had occasional and strong fluctuations towards that immortal prospect, which the noblest souls of pagan antiquity could not renounce;—were there no other reason to suppose this, I could yet not allow myself to interpret the language of this lester applied to the departed,—“whom I trust that you will again meet,”—as a *merely* complimentary or soothing accommodation of phrase to the feelings and hopes of his correspondent.

This would not accord with the bold frankness of the writer's temper and style, and would be a purely gratuitous departure from it, because so easily avoided. It is rather to be judged that his fancy wavered between Plato and Epicurus, though his irregular passions, and licentious habits, with the daring independence and misanthropic spirit which they

fomented, biassed him towards the latter.—Such a vacillation is the best state of mind, concerning all beyond this short precarious life, which can be hoped for by those among us who reject the divine mission of Jesus !

And here another reflection, eminently favourable to Christianity, arises from the very fact, that for want of its influence, an intellect so noble, and feelings so exquisite as Lord Byron's, could be so frequently warped (by his own implied admission) into a state of overt hostility to human virtue and well-being ; that the writer of this letter, with a soul capable of appreciating and loving (I trust, for the time, sincerely) the beauty and happiness of Christian devotion and benevolence, could yet persist in wanton contributions to the overthrow of such principles, and the blighting of such enjoyments. How solemn a lesson against permitting the mind to rush and wander in its own reckless, meteor-like course, and to be but a brilliant torch of devastation, while it might have shone as a light to the world.

In connexion with this thought it may be observed, that no part of the letter is, in my view, more affecting or instructive, than the remark,—“ A man's creed does not depend upon *himself*.” Have we not in these words an implied, though probably unintentional testimony to the necessity of that divine influence, which, it is to be feared, the distinguished writer had, then at least, never sought ? No man's productions bear witness so strongly, and so eloquently, as Lord Byron's, to the evil that is in the world : no man had detected with a more quick and deep penetration, or delineated with so powerful a hand, the depravation of human nature. Admitting that he, as a philosophic poet, drew a faithful portrait of man, or even allowing, as we must, for

much exaggerated colouring, what is more improbable, than that a being, at once sensual, proud, and malignant, should have any *settled will* to believe the pure and humbling religion of the Bible,—a system of love, peace, and self-denial,—except by first deriving a new moral strength from its Author? What more evident than that such a being is naturally under the bias of a *contrary will*?—Oh, that a mind awake to the value of Christian faith, and yet convinced that “a man’s creed does not depend upon *himself*,” had so far acted on its convictions, as to ask even of an “unknown God,”—“Work in me to will of thy good pleasure!”

It may, however, be said by sceptics or by fatalists, that I misunderstand or wrest Lord Byron’s language; that he would represent belief as a mere involuntary mental state, like our sensations. I allow that this may be the more probable *intention* of his words, particularly as connected with those which follow; though such a view of the nature of belief is irreconcilable with the obvious fact, how strongly it is every day modified by inclination, and swayed by present interests or passions. But, were the correctness of that supposed notion admitted, it could never disprove, that, in the same manner as correct or erroneous sensation depends on the healthful or diseased state either of the body or mind, so a belief or disbelief of what is most momentous, a correct or erroneous view of moral and revealed truth, may depend on the healthful or diseased state of the moral principles and affections. Granting only the being of a Power who formed and sustains us, it is no less within the sphere of that Power to rectify our moral affections or mental perceptions than our physical sensations. Nothing less than a *demonstration*

of atheism, which is impossible, could shew, that "a man's creed," any more than his bodily or mental health, is subject to no good influence on which he may rationally calculate, and which therefore he may rationally seek.

It is much to be lamented, that while sceptics persuade themselves that belief is not to be sought, because, like health, it is involuntary, there are also believers, (I hope but few,) who, holding the very opposite persuasion, that it depends on the *will* to receive or reject evidence, yet deny that man can in any degree *seek* its reception; alleging that, when he has a will to do so, it must be wholly an *unsought* gift; thus supporting the notion, that his "creed does not depend upon himself," in its enervating and paralysing sense; making him to be altogether passive in the acquirement of a right belief. The one sect, rejecting the gospel, contend that there is no such thing, *metaphysically*, as *willing* to believe. The other, receiving the gospel, not only affirm that there is no such thing, *morally*, as willing to believe, unless a new will be given from above; but they hence infer, that men have only to *wait passively* for this gift. The foundation of this latter theory appears by far the more correct; but the inference entirely unwarranted and pernicious.

These cursory views of a question that includes difficulties insoluble by the human mind, may be deemed crude and confused by reasoners, who think they have approached much more nearly to the true solution; but in aiming at practical utility, we need not aspire to metaphysical acuteness or systematic precision.

It is most cordially admitted that even the faintest and most transient *wish* after what is really good, whether the

wish of a right belief, or affection, or practice, is a free gift of God; but it is equally certain, that these *wishes* exist, more or less, in the minds of many, who have as yet no settled *will* either to believe or obey. Is it not the paramount duty and interest of these persons immediately to foster and consolidate their wishes, to make them vital and energetic, by giving to them the quality of supplication,—praying that He who infused them would strengthen them into the prevailing will and purpose of the soul? We speak not of resolved *unwavering atheism*, if such a state of mind be credible; but no state short of this can preclude the duty, or can *desperately* exclude the benefits, of prayer. That Lord Byron had, sometimes at least, the *wish* to believe, may be inferred both from his full perception of the “great advantage” of belief, and from the ingenious declaration, “*Video meliora proboque.*” It would be most consolatory to hope, that this wish was in his latter days more effectually cherished. The reference to the theological views of Chillingworth and Clarke, discloses a certain degree of attention to such varieties of religious opinion, as one would have judged him likely to pass by with disdain. But besides this, there seems something almost predictive in the remark that “nothing is more common than for the early sceptic to end in a firm belief;” and it is not easy to account for its introduction, except from a wish to intimate some presentiment or experience of such a tendency in himself. A determined infidel could scarcely have offered the observation, unaccompanied by some philosophizing or satiric comment on the mental decrepitude of those who had undergone such a change; and had he been capable of the good feeling which Lord Byron displayed in this letter, would have omitted it

wholly, because in this case disinclined to guard the fact by the wonted and unwelcome explanation.*

The rapid nature of Lord Byron's mortal illness, and that early summons from the world which broke off his splendid efforts in the cause of an oppressed nation, are mournful objects of thought; and they become far more so from our dark, unrelieved uncertainty regarding the final state of his mind, the temper with which his spirit passed into eternity.

When we think how lightly "all the fame which ever cheated Humanity,"—all the "accumulated" renown of this world,—was professedly esteemed by one who shared in it so amply,—how can we but shudder, even at *imagining*, that this vain glory of unconsecrated genius, and the more transient blandishments of pleasure, mixed with so many pangs, could suffice to work the ruin of a lofty soul, which should have learned to glory in the perfections of a merciful God, and to delight eternally in Him! And, if we cannot figure to ourselves so fatal an exchange without profound melancholy, then how deep must we confess to have been the madness of our own hearts, whenever we have put the same boundless felicities at hazard for the sake of a comparative *pittance* of base gratification, or of such a scanty dole of this world's praise, or gain, as could but disappoint and irritate desire.

With respect to the immediate subject of these reflections,

* In the instance of De La Harpe, adduced in Note F, (which, though not named by Lord Byron, was perhaps not unknown to him,) the reality and strength of this "belief" are evinced by the deep feelings of penitence, gratitude, and devotion which it prompted; and which are expressed with all the eloquence of the *heart*.

while it is not forbidden to indulge the hope even of possibilities, we ought to view both his life and death as affording a warning more forcible than volumes of admonition, on the importance of early adopting, and firmly adhering to those principles which will alone cheer a desolate and dying hour. It seems, as indeed was to be expected, that he had, in that crisis, no associate or attendant to whom his deepest thoughts and sentiments were at all likely to be disclosed.

Intercessions, I cannot doubt, had long been anxiously offered on his behalf, at least by relatives; and some of these in the blessed spirit of Christian forgiveness: others, as the preceding pages affectingly shew, by one unknown to him, from the pure promptings of a Christian solicitude for his welfare, enhanced by his peculiar gifts and high responsibilities. Till the heavenly records of charity shall be at last unrolled, we know not what more and similar petitions may have been poured forth from hearts that responded to his genius, and deplored its aberrations. Nor can any pronounce, till after "the judgment is set, and the books are opened," that these were ultimately and *altogether* fruitless.

I feel these reflections painfully inadequate to the importance of the subject. There is one of a more personal and minor nature, at which I have already glanced, and in which my pleasure may be shared by those who would gladly soften the dark shades that rest upon Lord Byron's memory. It will easily be conceived, that, from the contemptuous asperity of some passages in his works, I could not without a conflict transmit the above communication, doubting that the answer, if *any* should be returned, might evince a disposition which would at once give me pain, and shew the inutility of my attempt to benefit or interest him, even by the most

touching display of Christian excellence. I therefore experienced a gratification quite unreckoned on, in that tone of feeling which pervades the letter ; so remote from any thing like irritated pride, or even diminished admiration, on account of the heavy censures which the prayer involves ; so unmixed with any apparent distaste of the religious sentiment or phraseology of her who offered it ; and so marked by a delicate courtesy toward myself.

It remains to say a few words on the publicity now given to this correspondence. Concerning her whose piety gave rise to it, I shall say little ; affection may well indulge the silence it prefers, when a stranger, and such a stranger, has felt and recognised the worth of its object. Undoubtedly no one could less anticipate this publicity, or would have shunned it with more singleness of heart, than that beloved individual, the sanctuary of whose retired devotions has been thus unlocked. But yet could her disinterested mind have been convinced in her last hours of life, that good might probably arise from the disclosure, the same principle of Christian love which gave birth to her secret intercessions, would have forbidden her to lay any restriction on the wishes of others, when such an effect was contemplated. With respect to Lord Byron, when we enter into the fearful consideration how much evil may have flowed, and yet may flow, both from some of his productions, and from the recorded sentiments and example of their author, it would seem culpable if thoughts from his pen, possessing in any measure the quality of an antidote, were withheld from the world.*

* This opinion was further strengthened by the appearance of a work published while the second edition of this volume

Prayer having originated the correspondence, and forming its chief topic, the present volume, which has prayer for its subject, which particularly treats of intercession, and in which Lord Byron's works had been previously adverted to, seems a sort of prepared vehicle for its publication; though nothing could be more remote from the writer's thoughts, than that these letters and reflections would ever be annexed to his pages, or indeed be published in any form. Such however having been the course of circumstances, he concludes with a petition, in which Christian readers will unite, that they may be made conducive to the previous design,—persuasive to devotion, and contributory to happiness.

was in the press, and by its very unexpected reference to the foregoing letters.* It seemed just, that those whose attention is chiefly fixed on the moral and religious aspects of character, (and this in proportion to the distinction and influence of the party,) should have the means of comparing the actual correspondence with the notes of a conversation which related to it.

* Medwin's *Conversations of Lord Byron*, page 118, 8vo. edition.

NOTE G.

——— *preventing* mercy, which inclined him so to seek the heavenly boon. Page 245.

It will hardly be suspected that the writer is blind to the difficulty which these views of grace and duty involve; or to the ease with which disputants, on both sides, may exhibit a species of inconsistency in them, both as expressed here and elsewhere. He would reply to all similar disputations, in the following words of Abbadie:—

“Most persons are persuaded, that the Deity preserves, nourishes, and sustains us by a perpetual concurrence, without which the aliments that we take, and the care of our preservation, would be in vain; and by which we immediately subsist.—Yet we find none irrational enough to embarrass themselves with questions like these:—If I nourish myself, by taking necessary aliments, how can it be said that it is God who nourishes and preserves me? Or, if it be God who does this, how am I obliged to nourish and to preserve myself? People do not raise these difficulties in nature: they do raise them in religion. Yet they would be as well founded in the one as in the other; since they arise out of

that dependence on the Divinity which belongs both to our being and our new being.

“In nature, we know that we subsist by the divine concurrence, and we do not inquire the mode of it. In religion, we are not satisfied with knowing that grace regenerates, but we would know the mode of this operation, and we set ourselves to discover it; thus the difficulties by which no one is perplexed on the question of eating and drinking, and the support of bodily life, become appalling in regard to moral and spiritual life. Ask the reason of this from the heart of man.—In nature, our mind acts naturally; in religion, it is cheated by the passions, which seek only matter of doubt.—For ourselves, it suffices us, on such points, to be as reasonable in religion as we are in natural affairs.”

Traité de la Vér. de la Rel. Chrét.

tom. ii. pp. 460—61.

If it be objected that there is no parallelism, nor even close analogy, in the cases,—it is not pretended, (nor could it be by the author cited,) that the difficulties in the doctrines of grace^v are in no respects greater than those found in nature, or are strictly analagous to them; but only that the latter class of difficulties are great enough and similar enough to prove the unreasonableness of stumbling at the former. Perhaps we may approach somewhat more nearly to an illustration of the especial difficulty in view, by reference to the means used for restoring bodily *health*. Some skilful physicians have been, and, thank God, some *are* sincere Christians. Need we name Boerhaave, Haller, Grew, Willis,

Browne, and Cheyne? I could, with genuine pleasure, add several *living* names to these.—Suppose such a physician to call on a person labouring under a decay of which he himself thinks lightly, so as to be quite disinclined to all remedies, while yet in the eye of science his state is evidently hopeless, except the constitution can be renovated. The physician says, with friendly urgency,—Your case is highly dangerous. It is your *duty* to seek health and the preservation of life. Take these medicines daily. Adopt strictly the regimen which I shall now prescribe. Walk early, and during a fixed time, upon the hills. You are *bound* to do all these things, however averse or unable you may be, or seem to be. If you do them, I can all but promise you health;—if you do not, you will die; and this through your self-will, or apathy, or disbelief of my assurances.—Let us imagine the patient to be persuaded by these arguments, to adopt these means, and to recover. His visitor, now, it is but too probable, finds him unimpressed with gratitude to the Divine Providence,* apparently ascribing all to second causes; and he reminds him,—Nay, but thank *God* for all this. It was he who sent you a sincere adviser as his instrument. He it was who preserved your faculties, to understand, and in some sort, believe my advice; who caused it to over-weigh your manifest aversion to compliance; who gave you organic power to take and retain the remedies offered; who communicated to each of

* Here our intended analogy does not hold; for he who is spiritually healed, is—by the moral soundness of mind, which has been thus imparted—taught to feel, and say, “Unto God be all the glory.” But this difference no way affects the other points of our comparison.

these their original qualities, and their immediate agency on your frame ; who so far upheld your muscular strength that you could still avail yourself of air and exercise. Do not, in any sense, thank yourself, or me, as the author of health, but Him who is the First and Efficient Cause of all good, the Author of your recovery and of your being.

Now we can too easily suppose some brother physician so professedly a *metaphysician*, but so questionably a theist, as to say,—Why do you thus perplex your patient, by recommending him to look above his own agency and yours, and the natural means employed,—when you admit, that, but for these, he would not have been now living, and when you know, that, as to the nature and mode of a superior and primary causation, we are profoundly ignorant ?

It will be somewhat harder, I apprehend, to find any neighbour so much a fatalist as to offer the *contrary* kind of remonstrance,—Why did you delude your patient by telling him it was his *duty* to seek recovery ; that he was *bound* to use means, and warranted to hope for life in doing so, and then *only*,—when you now openly contradict yourself by ascribing his restoration entirely to the Divine power and goodness ; and when you knew, that to this source, if it should take place at all, his recovery would be wholly ascribable ?—It were rash to deny, that, in our philosophic age, *such* a reasoner may be found,—but hardly among physicians. There are however *spiritual* practitioners, (and *graduates* among them,) who proceed on principles analagous to these ; who seem to account it their sole direct office to keep the restored in *comfortable* health ; who think it delusive and impious directly to prescribe to those who are most grievously sick, though they may (if it please God) profit by hearing or

reading the frequent prescriptions of cordials for the convalescent; nay, who are at pains to explain to (or before) such wretched persons, their inability, in *all* senses, to use the means proper for their cure; declaring not only that they cannot because they *will* not, but that the converse is equally true;—they will not, because they *cannot*. Let it not be said, this is imitating the ruler of the synagogue: for he, probably, was a Pharisee. He said,—“*Come*, and be healed,”—though “not on the sabbath-day.” These physicians say,—Ye *cannot come* and be healed, either on that day or the other six.

But I have digressed from the direct illustration intended. I return to the supposition, that our Christian physician having, instrumentally, persuaded, cured, and admonished his patient, is himself so lectured from *both* sides. He stands convicted perhaps (at least in each lecturer’s eyes) of metaphysical inconsistencies; yet, may he not, at the bar of common sense, and of Scriptural Christianity, hope for an acquittal?

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